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ECHOES

justice, peace and creation news

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FEATURING

GOING TO THE 8TH ASSEMBLY

Echoes From Elsewhere

An introduction to *Echoes* magazine in reactions, facts and issues from all over the world

Social Development and Public Policy

It is remarkable that in spite of the economic shocks of the early 1990s, Cuba continues to rank among the top five per cent of 125 developing countries on indicators of social development such as life expectancy, infant and maternal mortality, adult literacy, primary and secondary school enrolments and many others. In fact, according to these social indicators, Cuba stood in 1996 among the top fifth of all countries — including the most highly developed.

Cuba's economic prospects for the immediate future remain rather bleak. The continued US trade embargo worsens economic difficulties arising from other causes. Nevertheless, Cuba has demonstrated that given enough priority attention from the state, as well as determined support by the people, popular social programmes do not have to be sacrificed to pay the costs of painful structural adjustments.

Taken from UNRISD NEWS *the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development bulletin. Read more about this subject in the forthcoming book:* Social Development and Public Policy: A Study of Some Successful Experiences, *edited by Dharam Ghai, to be published by Macmillan (London).*

The cost of the failure to reduce debt service

Mozambique is the poorest country in the world. Yet it will continue to pay $107 million every year in debt service — that is $6.60 for every Mozambican child, man and woman. By contrast, Mozambique spends only $2 per person per year on health and $4 on education.

Under the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) initiative, the international community has agreed to cancel some of the countries' debts. But it is not enough — only those debts which will never be paid will be canceled. (...)

People die every year because money is diverted from health to debt service payments. According to United Nations Development Programme figures, if Mozambique took just half of its debt service payments per person per year and spent that on health and education, it would save the lives of 6,000 women who die each year in childbirth and 115,000 children who would otherwise die before their fifth birthday.

Extracted from the European Parliamentarians for Africa (AWEPA) Quarterly Bulletin, Vol. 12, 1998, nr. 2.

ChukwuEmeka Agbayi, introduces himself as "a Nigerian, deeply interested in genuine struggles for emancipation and the enthronement of such values as democracy, equality, fair play and equity all over the globe". He sent this prayer.

"Our father
Who dwells on the Rock*
Praised be your name.
Praised your decrees.
Let prevail on earth
Your will as in our land.
Give us this day our daily tonic:
minister purloins millions of naira
labour unions dissolved like salt in water
transition trains departure postponed
arrival date unknown.
O our father give us this day our daily tonic.
Our father on the Rock
This is your kingdom come.
We glorify your name.
We salaam before you.
Forgive us our ingratitude.
Forgive our insatiety.
Lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from the evil of knowledge.
Herd us, too,
With the genteel strength of your muzzle
Along paths of fear
Into gardens of ignorance.
For yours is the land
The power and the glory
Forever and ever. Amen"

** Aso Rock is the official residence of Nigeria's military dictatorship.*

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Photo: ©Peter Solbjergho/Peter Williams - WCC

Editorial

Echoes
justice, peace and creation news

Echoes is an occasional publication of the World Council of Churches' Programme Unit III on Justice, Peace and Creation.
It is intended to share information and insights on the concern of the Unit.
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by Bob Scott

ECHOES has now been in publication for six years. We are very grateful for the many kind messages of support and appreciation we have received as we have developed the style and content of ECHOES. We are not professional publishers and it has been a learning process for us — but we are extremely lucky to be supported by very creative professionals such as Marie Arnaud-Snakkers who does the graphic design, Miriam Reidy-Prost who helps us with proof-reading and our printer Marc Picarat.

The forthcoming assembly of the World Council of Churches — to be held in Harare from December 3 to 14 this year, presented us with quite a challenge. What kind of ECHOES could we publish that might be a useful document for those preparing to go to the assembly, as well as for those who know about the assembly and will be watching for what it says and does?

We realise that past issues of ECHOES — especially recent ones on the Economy, the Programme to Overcome Violence and Globalisation — have already begun to spell out some of the important issues for the assembly. But what else should a pre-assembly ECHOES do? Publish a "shopping list" of issues around the Justice, Peace and Creation theme? Review the documents the assembly will be considering? Prepare a kind of tourists' view of the assembly itself?

Our answer has been to produce an ECHOES which tries to expose the issues and perceptions which undergird the time, the place and the global environment in which the assembly happens. These are only the opinions of particular people, of course. But, nevertheless, they are meant to provoke both debate and meditation.

The fact that the assembly is in Africa has special significance. It will be an opportunity for everyone to come to terms with the dynamics and realities of the continent, perhaps even to correct the myths and misunderstandings about Africa. For that reason, and although it is not the usual ECHOES practice to have staff write articles, we asked Unit III director Sam Kobia, at one time the general secretary of the NCC of Kenya, to begin that journey of discovery for us. Apart from his own personal statement, on page 4, he writes about the communities, the reawakening, the changing role of the states and reconstruction. Amba Ewudziwa, a former WCC staff member, helps direct our feet, and minds, on arrival in Harare.

The "family of Unit III", meaning the networks we are associated with, the Unit III Commission members, the staff and the host of individuals and organisations who have identified with the Justice, Peace and Creation imperatives, have many things to say to the WCC assembly — and those who actually get to Harare will say them.

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF AFRICA

"It is an undeniable fact that the reconstruction and rebuilding of Africa is first and foremost the responsibility of Africans themselves. However, in the contemporary world, where interdependence is another undeniable fact, there is every need for the rest of the world to accompany the people of Africa in the task of reconstructing their continent. The World Council of Churches has stated in no uncertain terms, and in many contexts, that it will accompany the African churches and peoples in this noble task.

Through the Africa Programme and other programmatic work in Africa, WCC has met, touched, heard and talked to many Africans. What Africans wish most is that they be listened to because they have a Story and stories to tell; stories of and about life.

The Harare Assembly will promote spaces for story-telling, especially at the Padare, which itself means a meeting place for sharing life with life. As we move to Harare, the ecumenical movement needs to develop the capacity to listen and to hear. It is not uncommon in Africa to hear a story teller at several intervals ask the listener "Have you heard what I have told you?" or "Are you hearing what I am telling you?", especially if the listener has the habit of not verbalising his/her response.

In Africa the beauty and the sweetness of the story is in the detail. One may take very long before coming to the "crux of the matter". Non-African delegates to the Harare Assembly must be prepared to exercise patience if they want to "listen and hear" Africans tell their stories. At a Padare, time is not a constraint. If the story is unfinished today, it will be continued the following day. After all, life does not end today, there is always tomorrow!

If there is only one thing we have learnt in the Africa Programme, it is that Africans have embarked on a journey. At the 1997 Jubilee and African Kairos (JAK) Conference the participants said that, "We are aware that we are setting out on a long and difficult journey. Nevertheless, we resolve to travel it together into the next millennium....marching ahead into the future in solidarity and faith." The journey this time round is the journey of hope. And that is something to rejoice about. Come to Harare prepared to listen and hear Africans tell stories about this journey; and come prepared to respond."

Sam Kobia

Director Unit III
Justice Peace and Creation

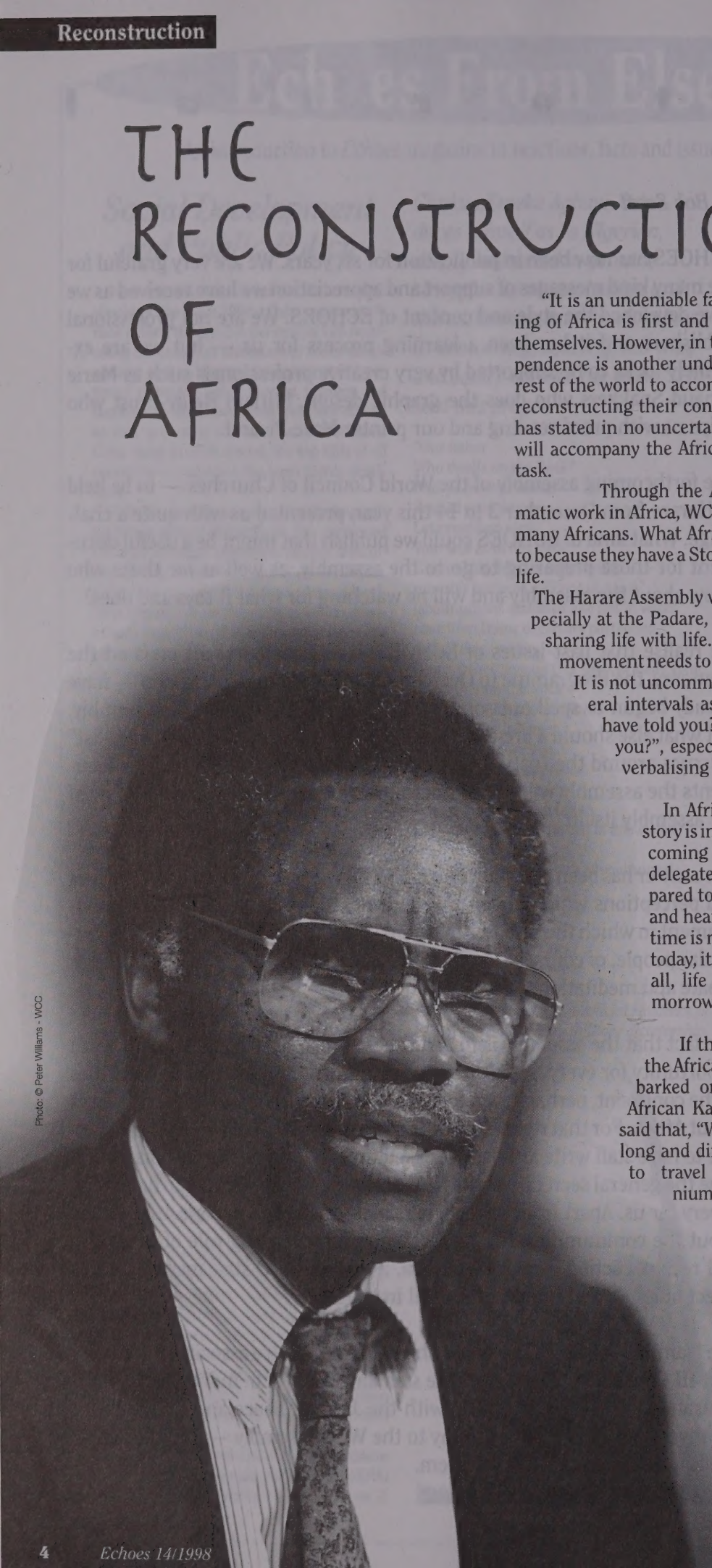

Photo: © Peter Williams - WCC

A QUEST FOR LIFE WITH DIGNITY IN SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

by Rev. Samuel Kobia

In September 1991, the WCC Central Committee initiated a debate under the theme, "Africa through new eyes" which recognised "the critical challenges facing the people and nations of Africa, which affect their dignity, stability and even survival".

In March 1993, the Executive Committee revisited the notion of "Africa through new eyes", assessing the work done since 1991. Among other things the Ecumenical Monitoring Programme in South Africa (EMPSA) was well underway, making a valuable contribution to the process for the first democratic elections in South Africa.

To translate that policy statement into concrete programmatic work, the Executive Committee set up the "Towards Reconstruction in Africa Programme" whose objectives were to:

- listen to the voices of the churches and peoples and learn from their experience of life with God in their country, region and about the African situation in general;
- promote a culture of life and peace with justice on which to base the quest for just, participatory and sustainable societies;
- enhance the fulfilment of human dignity in Africa and the affirmation of the African identity.
- seek viable alternatives for living, based on the African concept of community;
- discern the church's mission in peace-making, conflict prevention and management, and reconciliation at community and national levels, taking into account respective African values;
- equip Christians and other citizens with relevant social, political and economic literacy, which includes analysis of the nature and purpose of power;
- work towards the promotion and respect of human and peoples' rights, ensuring that people have a good grasp and understanding of the nature and scope, as well as philosophical foundation of human rights.

The Executive Committee noted with concern that, since 1991 in Africa generally, "conditions have worsened amid civil conflict, violent repression and injustice. It becomes imperative that effective change occurs, towards lasting peace, the enabling of people to participate in making the decisions that affect their lives, and respect for the integrity of the human person and community. The churches as a social and moral force enjoy real and potential credibility in helping to bring about such change.

The World Council of Churches holds high the vision of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation as a guiding framework for working for a just and sustainable society. The WCC should encourage, accompany and support the churches and the ecumenical movement in Africa more vigorously, at all levels, to this end."

But, as the programme took shape, it became very clear that the major challenge facing the continent was that of rebuilding, reconstruction and reconciliation; reclaiming the dignity and affirming the identity of the African people; life in sustainable communities.

This set the WCC a new and daunting challenge. The fact that the VIIIth Assembly is to be held in Zimbabwe not only points to that challenge, but gives the ecumenical family an opportunity to come to terms with it.

 by sam kobia

AFRICA IS RE-AWAKENING

Photo: © Sebastiao Salgado - WCC

"Towards Reconstruction in Africa" was a WCC-Unit III Programme that took three years to evolve, including the elaboration of a plan of action to promote the concept of "the Church in dialogue with the African Society". Two methodologies were designed: dialogue through ecumenical studies and reflection, and dialogue through ecumenical exchange visits within Africa and between Africans. Part of the harvest of these two processes was offered at the Jubilee and the African Kairos (JAK) conference which took place from May 10 to 17, 1997 in Johannesburg, South Africa.

A study on Democracy and the Ethics of Good Governance undertaken by four groups, convened by Unit III, provided the dynamic framework for in-depth reflections on African politics and the role of religion today. In several countries of Africa, the church has been actively engaged in the democratisation process. In a good number of those cases, the churches' role was thrust on them by history, given that many of the institutions of the civil society had been systematically disabled by more than two decades of dictatorship in Africa. By and large the churches were ill equipped for such a role.

The study process, therefore, was instrumental in building the capacity of the churches to play a meaningful role in the search for peaceful, just, and participatory societies in Africa. One of the findings of the study was that while the struggles for democracy in Africa have been going on for a long time, the current democratisation process is not necessarily a process of peoples' emancipation. Rather, it is a process of legitimising the disempowerment of the people. In most countries of Africa the preoccupation is with the process and not the content of democracy, thereby reducing democracy, to a merely strategic instrument for some people to claim the seats of power.

The process of dialogue identified many issues that need further reflection and action in areas of theological/biblical imperatives, social change, and methodologies and strategies. The most critical issues include:

- faith and politics
- faith and economics
- gospel and culture
- mission and partnership

The WCC Assembly in Harare, in December 1998, must provide spaces for more sharing on how churches and peoples of Africa are addressing these issues in their own contexts.

Churches in the democratisation process should be informed by the prophetic vision

While the church should be concerned about, and indeed support, the building of democratic systems, even more fundamental to her social calling is the articulation and promotion of democracy as a vision. That would be in keeping with the prophetic messages of the Old Testament prophets, and with Christ's gospel. At the centre of such a vision are three basic elements — equality, liberty and justice. These are part of the jubilee motif as announced by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry.

The Africa programme offers to the Assembly the methodology of exchanging the stories of our lives —sharing life with life — as the basis for mutual inspiration and expressions of solidarity. LIFE is enriched when lived in dignity and in communities that are environmentally sustainable and where peace with justice are daily experiences of the people. The Africa Programme challenged those involved in it to search for a new vision.

Fifty years ago the vision of a free Africa inspired Pan-Africanists to start the struggle for liberation from the colonial yoke. Today the forces of globalisation are creating new challenges and uncertainties. Our hitherto economically and socially viable communities are being made vulnerable by the processes of globalisation. The destruction of the traditional forms of livelihood are reducing many Africans to conditions of mere survival. Indeed many Africans today have sunk below acceptable levels of poverty.

Fragmentation and exclusion are some of the most obvious characteristics of the globalisation process. Even our social cohesion is under threat as globalisation plunders and destroys local cultures and traditions in search of profitability.

Evident also is the onslaught on civil society, which has been virtually destroyed after thirty years of misrule and oppression by African dictators and despots.

Aware of these new challenges, the Africa Programme endeavoured to articulate new visions for a better Africa.

Renewed hope

One of the main insights gained in the Africa Programme is that there is renewed hope in Africa. Africa is at a threshold. There is a new awakening everywhere on the continent. But, above all, the women of Africa are acutely conscious of the forces of their domination. The women's consultation that preceded the JAK conference called on African women to deny, and actively struggle against, the hardships imposed on them by the practices and logic of war and conflict. The consultation further affirmed the dignity of the African woman and suggested strategies for reversing the negative image portrayed by the media.

The consultation challenged the churches and governments of Africa to be in solidarity with women in their struggle against oppressive traditional, cultural and religious beliefs and practices in building peaceful and just communities. Their recommendations to the WCC ought to be received with the utmost seriousness by ecumenical organisations.

The statement from the Youth Forum of JAK called on the churches, and African society in general, to acknowledge the signs of the times. The youth of Africa have embraced the spirit of positive thinking and desire to play a constructive role in building a better Africa for all. At the JAK conference, they renewed their call and commitment to work for justice and to seek peace and pursue it.

The hope expressed by the youth is also the hope of African children. The challenge to the ecumenical movement in general, and to the WCC in particular, is to ensure that such hope is not wasted. We should not allow the hope of the future generations to be squandered or sacrificed on the altar of greed and corruption at the hands of the present leadership.

One of the findings of the Africa Programme is that a majority of the African people are restless for a genuine social change in the continent. This restlessness is expressed in what I would call Afro-Renaissance. Africa is awakening. The rebirth of Pan-Africanism is well underway, and it offers great promise for a brighter Africa. Therein lies the African Kairos, and the ecumenical movement is invited to accompany the African people in their great march towards a new Africa, ready to dawn with the new millennium.

by Sam Kobia

THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE STATE AND THE CHALLENGE FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

Photo: © John Taylor - WCC

From the point of view of the world economy, Africa as a region is at the very bottom. And in the logic of globalisation, the further down you are, the more marginalised and excluded you will become.

By the end of the Cold War era, the majority of African countries had not moved one bit towards serious industrialisation. The few that did, such as Egypt, only managed to develop parasitic industries. South Africa is the most industrialised country in sub-Saharan Africa, with Zimbabwe coming a poor second. The rest never really got anywhere near what could be called successful industrialisation. That puts the region in a severely disadvantaged position because its countries have no capacity whatsoever to compete at the world market level nor, in the global system, to be able to negotiate anything in their own interest. The most Africa has been able to offer is its raw materials, most of which could today be substituted with synthetic commodities.

For Africa the 1980s were clearly the lost decade as far as economic development is concerned. During the entire decade, the continent experienced economic decline. The economy grew at an average rate of a dismal 2.1 per cent per annum. During the same period, the per capita incomes fell at the average rate of 1 per cent per annum, which meant that the human and social conditions of the majority of the African people worsened considerably.

The woes of Africa were not confined to poor economic performance alone; hunger and famine were exacerbated by drought, while AIDS and drug-resistant malaria decimated large sections of the population, causing real threats to development.

The 1990s have not made good the hopes predicted following the end of the Cold War, while the battered image of Africa has yet to improve. The UN, World Bank, IMF, and a whole host of other reputable institutions had predicted that Africa's economy would grow at the rate of between 3 to 3.5 per cent per annum in the first half of the 1990s. Unfortunately, the reality proved different — the economic crisis deepened even further. The 1993 ECA data indicated that African economies only grew by 3 per cent in 1990, 2.3 percent in 1991 and 1.5 per cent in 1992 (Sadig Rasheed in *Africa Within the World*). Those averages were for the whole of Africa. In sub-Sahara, the growth rates were mere 2.1 and 1.4 percent, respectively, for 1991 and 1992.

Both during the colonial and the neocolonial periods, the concept and practice of the state was to be an instrument of control, not in the interest of the people, but in fact as a threat to their interests.

Africa loses her geopolitical significance

With the end of the Cold War, Africa lost her geopolitical significance. Without superpower rivalry, the region became geopolitically irrelevant. It was no longer tenable for the Western governments to prop up African dictators as bumpers against communism. This also created an embarrassing situation of relationships with oppressive regimes. How do you dump old friends without losing face?

Fortunately for them, the question of legitimacy provided a very convenient excuse. Suddenly, the West began to write human rights, accountability, transparency and the rule of law into their economic aid policies. These became the most important conditionalities laid down by the Bretton Woods Institutions. From that premise, the West's call for democracy in Africa was by default. That is why we see that, in many places, we have only low-intensity or manipulated democracy. In my observation, the hurriedly organised multi-party elections amount to sponsored democracy in Africa. We need to go beyond such exercises and begin to lay the foundations for democratisation of the society and not just democratisation of politics.

The late Claude Aké couldn't have articulated it better when he said,

"The democratisation of Africa appears to have been largely a matter of form rather than content. But the ascendancy of form over content results in a significant blockage to democratisation. For the people of Africa, instead of emancipating them, democratisation is becoming a legitimation of their disempowerment. They are effectively worse off than they were before democratisation, for their alienation from power and their oppression are no longer visible as problems inviting solution." (*The Democratisation of Disempowerment*)

Power and control

From the point of view of politics, the globalisation process complicates the social condition of the African people. On the one hand, the state in Africa had been built up to be strong and was helped to acquire the capacity to control and suppress the people. Both during the colonial and the neocolonial periods, the concept and practice of the state was to be an instrument of control. The state was not about good governance. That led to the privatisation of the state, which became a formidable force, not in the interest of the people, but in fact as a threat to their interests.

Politics in Africa, therefore, have been shaped by that understanding of the state in Africa. It is primarily about access to state power, and the goals of political struggle are to capture an all-powerful state, which the winner can use (nay, abuse and misuse) as he or she (not as yet!!) pleases. In this situation, state power is overvalued and the struggle over it is brutal, intense, and ruthless, to the extent that the protagonists could massacre thousands of citizens for the sake of attaining it. And once one has ascended to the state house, or whatever the seat of power is, one is ready to do anything to stay there — more often than not through sheer brutality.

During the neo-colonial period, the "strong man" was helped to attain and retain power by the sponsoring external power. If it was a military dictator, the power was kept through the barrel of the gun. If it was a benevolent dictator, it was through patronage underwritten by the benefactor. Either way the state was the basis for that power.

Ethnicity mis-used as a source of power

One of the implications of the globalisation process is the weakening of the nation state. The state alone is not enough guarantee against the insecurity felt by the occupants of the state throne. It is here that the ethnic base becomes another source of power. It is very likely that multi-party politics in Africa will continue to be characterised by ethnicism for many more years to come. The situation will be aggravated by the struggle over the diminishing resources. If the situation is not redressed, there will be serious ethnic rivalries, resulting in further marginalisation of people.

Many competing actors

The situation prevailing in Africa left the churches as just about the only institutions that could speak out against social injustices, most of the other institutions having been greatly weakened by the state power. In many cases, the churches, through the coordination of national councils of churches (NCCs), played a very important role in advocacy for democracy and civic education.

Today, with the advent of multi-partism and general liberalisation, there are many more actors in the political arena. As the nation state backslides, spaces are opened for NGOs, including the delivery of economic and social services. Within these spaces, there is also an increase of bilateral and multilateral relations, in which many local NGOs are assigned the role of subcontractors in the sphere of services delivery. In the 1990s, we have also seen the emergence and proliferation of human rights, peace, and environmental NGOs in Africa. The NGO arena is therefore getting crowded and, with less resources, conflict between local and international NGOs is inevitable.

Even more than the political and economic crises, the moral crisis poses the greatest challenge in Africa — and indeed in the world in general.

What leadership must the church provide?

The reason for underlining the above point is to emphasise the fact that there are now many competing actors in what used traditionally to be the domain of NCCs and churches, i.e., delivery of economic and social services. What is going to be the unique role of the ecumenical movement in the future? Where and what kind of leadership is expected of us? Here I would like to offer several suggestions:

- ***Moral leadership***

This is by far the most critical area in which the church is expected to play a specific role. Even more than the political and economic crises, the moral crisis poses the greatest challenge in Africa — and indeed in the world in general. There are serious ethical questions both at African and world levels that we must be prepared to give leadership in addressing.

We must recognise that the so-called new international economic order, being expressed through globalisation, is a global economic apartheid. It is basically a moral even before it becomes an economic and a social question.

The churches' moral leadership should also be discerned in the area of debt and structural adjustment programmes. Debt cancellation alone is not enough. Alongside the campaign for debt cancellation, the church must raise ethical questions about borrowing, lending, and spending. How responsible have we been in those three areas? The church must state in no uncertain terms that structural adjustment policies and programmes, and the debt servicing and repaying are unethical as long as they result in massive suffering of the people.

The third area to which the moral leadership of the church is called is fighting corruption. Corruption and graft exist everywhere in the world. What passes for commission in some parts of Europe could be considered as

corruption in others. So we cannot say that corruption only exists in the South. However, a society where corruption and graft are institutionalised and are generally accepted as a norm for behaviour will hardly progress. In countries like Nigeria and Kenya, respectively the first- and third-most corrupt countries in the world, the church has an enormous responsibility. Even more so when the two countries boast of very high percentage of Christians. A drastic change in Africa's ethical and moral climate is necessary for the continent to be able to utilise and allocate its resources justly and efficiently. I insist on the church's role in fighting corruption not only because it is Christian to do so. It is also African. From the traditional African point of view, a corrupt leader is a contradiction in terms. A leader is one whose moral integrity is unquestionable.

• Struggling for a life-centred vision

In all the parts of the world, we find life-threatening forces. Jesus came so that all may have life and have it more abundantly. There are four essentials for our life-centred vision:

- *Sustainance of life* through fulfilling the essential needs — clean air, water, food, health, shelter — of all people;
- *Protection of life* through peace-building and peace-making, overcoming violence, eliminating capital punishment, etc.
- *Enhancement of life* including building a democratic society, improving people's economic welfare by broadening opportunities and solidarity linkages.
- *Enrichment of life* through deepening people's cultural and spiritual life; building sustainable communities where shared social values help sustain family ties. Intellectual life and promotion of indigenous knowledge, sports and leisure, are also key ingredients in the enrichment of life.

My emphasis here is to discern a comprehensive vision to undergird our ecumenical work on life, of human beings and the rest of the creation — a kind of earth ethic. It is when all the above elements are present that we can confidently speak of life in dignity. Which suggests that Africa has a long way to go if we wish to claim life with dignity for most of our people.

The church must state in no uncertain terms that structural adjustment policies and programmes, and the debt servicing and repaying are unethical as long as they result in massive suffering of the people.

• Promoting democracy as a vision

The current so-called democratisation in Africa has been reduced to a competition for power. There is the danger of trivialising democracy by putting too much emphasis on multi-party elections. Important as these are, they hardly educate the people, even on the basics of democracy. The church should take the lead in rescuing democracy from being stripped of its value and quality. African elites who, for a long time, were kept out of power by dictators, see democracy as their only chance to get to positions of power. For them, democracy is merely a strategic instrument for getting power for themselves. The church should insist on promoting participatory democracy in which there is equality, freedom and justice for all. For democracy to have a qualitative difference, it must offer hope for the hopeless majority, and meaning to those in Africa and elsewhere whose lives are characterised by meaninglessness.

• Leadership in overcoming idolatry

The casino nature of economic globalisation leads to the worship of money as an idol. But we should take a harder look at this trend even within the realm of religion. A casino or a "get-rich-quick" gospel, is making its inroads in may parts of Africa. The gospel of prosperity is gaining uncritical acceptance even within the mainline, ecumenically inclined, churches. It is becoming increasingly common to find congregation members asking to be prayed for so that they can get rich — speculative spirituality? Stretched to the extreme, this approach could lead to devil worship, as has already been the case of Kenya where a presidential commission established that human sacrifice was going on in some parts of the country in the belief that, by participating in human sacrifice, you will make money and have the power to keep it as well.

A "casino gospel" in a society where poverty and unemployment are growing could be very dangerous indeed. The "get-rich-quick" preachers target youth and, as a result, the society and the church are losing many young people to the emerging sects. Here the ecumenical movement has a big challenge to its own interests and to those of the wider society.

by Sam Kobia

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF RECONSTRUCTION

The independence of Namibia and the end of apartheid in South Africa ushered in a new era for the whole of Africa. For churches and theologians, the theology of resistance and liberation is giving way to a theology of rebuilding and reconstruction.

The church in Africa is at cross-roads. While the institutional implication of Christian faith has been a reality for a long time, the problem of identity with respect to the faith is only now being debated seriously. As the Western churches are confronted with a well established and organised secular culture whose values are overwhelmed by technological advancement and a philosophy based on an economy of cut-throat competition, Africa is wrestling with the problem of reconstruction, rebuilding and reconciliation. While the Western society is going through a process of dechristianisation, the ecumenical movement in Africa is faced with the problem of bridging the gap between the highly institutionalised Western type of churches and the more charismatic, indigenously instituted churches whose theologies, though not well structured and systematic, are nevertheless more related to the life and conflicts of the people. The highly institutionalised churches in Africa tend to have more skilled human resources and are economically more well established compared to the African Independent Churches.

The ecumenical movement at national and regional levels has to come face to face with this reality. The membership of the ecumenical organisations includes both the more institutionalised and the more charismatic Christian communities. We have to be very creative in bridging the gap between the two. In so doing, we encounter the problem of a common ground of reflection regarding the realities that befall us as churches. Among these two schools of Christian spirituality, there are also the Pentecostal Evangelicals, who are increasingly becoming significant factors in the ecumenical movement.

It is for this reason that the ecumenical movement in Africa is an institution whose existence is necessary not only , due to the problems posed by denominationalism, but which could consolidate the theological resources of the different translations of the same message of Jesus Christ to Africa, and also helps safeguard against politicians who misuse religion by taking advantage of fragmentation within the church.

There is no doubt that a new theology of reconstruction is called for in Africa. The way Christianity was handed over to Africa is itself problematic. The theological problems we have today are partly due to the fact that colonialism's abuse of the dignity of the African person was partly endorsed by the early missionaries. And so our historical experience of Christianity raises the question of authenticity. The same problem is still being addressed by liberation theologians in Latin America and Black theologians in North America.

... colonialism's abuse of the dignity of the African person was partly endorsed by the early missionaries.

When we critically experience the biblical paradigms of liberation, especially the Exodus story, we realise that our actual historical experience of liberation from colonial domination is being called to question. What do we mean when we speak of "liberation from oppression" in our own context? Those who claim to have liberated us from the yoke of colonialism are today our oppressors. They have simply taken over the yoke of oppression from their colonial masters and are using the same apparatus of "divide and rule" to manipulate and exploit the people. They used popular themes of liberation to conscientise the people against the colonial master, but today they are using the same tactics of shrewd politics to destroy the people. In this regard, we are faced with the problem of violence. So long as we live in an unjust society, where the language of emancipation has been used to grab power for the sake of power, it is very difficult for the church to be non-partisan and at the same time carry the flag of liberation.

In our approach to the issue of violence, which is often linked to ethnicity, the church must develop a new theological outlook which would enhance peace education and resolution of conflicts.

This can only be done when we cease to recycle certain old ideas to resolve new problems. Our theologies must cease being library-centered and become true theologies of life.

Our theologies must cease being library-centered and become true theologies of life.

We must engage in contextual reading of the Bible which leads to the kind of praxis that is at once personally and collectively liberating. This kind of reading calls for a lifestyle of repentance and radical identification with the sufferings of God's people. Thus, the word of God becomes for us a source of spirituality that reflects our own existential condition. It becomes for us a source of a new awakening into a life of grace and collective reconstructing the word of God, whether we are black or white, Africans or Arabs, Americans or Indians. When interpreted from a truly contextual perspective, it becomes for us a source of LIFE (Dt. 8:3, John 5:39, Acts 5:20, 7:8).

Rev. Samuel Kobia, from Kenya, is Executive Director of Unit III Justice, Peace and Creation

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"Those who claim to have liberated us from the yoke of colonialism are today our oppressors."

BEING THE CHURCH OF GOD IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA: AN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE

by Dr Zephania Kameeta

AFRICA TODAY

Two years ago at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Africa Region Conference in Arusha, Tanzania, a dear friend of mine, the late Senator Ephraim Magagula of Swaziland, said in his farewell remarks, after listening to very good speeches on the well-being and future of our beloved continent, "I am very much impressed by the brilliant speeches and the quality of persons whom we have in leadership in our respective countries; but, with all this, why does Africa look like this?" He did not elaborate on what he meant with "... look like this". But I am confident that all of us who were present knew what he meant since nobody requested an explanation! This question is, however, elaborated by Keith Richburg, the *Washington Post* African-American journalist, in his book, *Out of Africa*:

"Mother Africa is often held up as some kind of black Valhalla, where the descendants of slaves would be welcomed back and where black men and women can walk in dignity. Sorry, but I've been there. I've had an AK-47 rammed up my nose, I've talked to machete-wielding Hutu militia-men with the blood of their latest victims splattered across their T-shirts. I've seen a cholera epidemic in Zaire, a famine in Somalia, a civil war in Liberia. I've seen cities bombed to near rubble, and other cities reduced to rubble, because their leaders let them rot and decay while they spirited away billions of dollars — yes, billions — into overseas bank accounts.

"I was drenched with sweat under the blistering sun, standing at the Rusumo Falls bridge, watching the bodies float past me. Sometimes they came one by one. Sometimes two or three together. They were bloated now, horribly discoloured. Most were naked, or stripped down to their underpants. Sometimes the hands and feet were bound together. Some were clearly missing some limbs. And as they went over the falls, a few got stuck together on a little crag, and stayed there flapping against the current, as though they were trying to break free. I couldn't take my eyes off one of them, the body of a little baby.

"I've also seen heroism, honour and dignity in Africa, particularly in the stories of ordinary people — brave Africans battling insurmountable odds to publish an independent newspaper, to organise a political party, to teach kids in some bush school and, usually, just to survive. But even with all the good I've found here, my perceptions have been hopelessly skewed by the bad. My tour in Africa coincided with two of the world's worst tragedies — Somalia and Rwanda. I've had friends and colleagues shot, stabbed, beaten by mobs, left to bleed to death on a Mogadishu street — one of them beaten so badly in the face that his friends could recognise him only by his hair and his clothes.

"So excuse me if I sound cynical, jaded. I'm beaten down, and I'll admit it. And it's Africa that has made me this way. I feel for her suffering, I empathise with her pain, and now, from afar, I still recoil in horror whenever I see yet another television picture of another tribal slaughter, another refugee crisis. But most of all I think: Thank God my ancestor got out, because, now, I am not one of them."

There are at this moment many feelings running through me after reading this article that are extremely difficult to describe. But there are four outstanding ones: shock, shame, anger and despair. I believe that you now also understand the question of Senator E. Magagula. What we need now in Africa to survive is to make a reality of what we have been eloquently expounding for the last 30 years. Africa will be saved not only by rhetoric in church and state, but by concerted actions. Most of the time, what we say is not followed by deeds but by more talking. The tragedy is that **good tidings are walking hand in hand with destructive actions**. The journalist we have quoted further says:

Africa will be saved not only by rhetoric in church and state, but by concerted actions. Most of the time, what we say is not followed by deeds but by more talking.

> "... But I am tired of lying. And I'm tired of all the ignorance and hypocrisy and the double standards. I hear and read about Africa, much of it from people who've never been there, let alone spent three years walking around amid the corpses. Talk to me about Africa and my black roots and my kinship with my African brothers and I'll throw it back in your face, and then I'll rub your nose in the images of the rotting flesh."

Africa needs honesty. Yes, honesty with ourselves and with this old continent — the cradle of humanity. For the sake of all of us today and the coming generations, we must shake off the fear of being rejected or persecuted by the church and/or governments and proclaim on the roof tops the truth which will liberate Africa from neo-colonialism, hypocrisy, lies, corruption, tribalism and poverty.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

We are in dire need of a confessing church which will, in the tradition of the prophets and apostles, tell herself and the world: SO SAYS THE LORD! Being the Church of God in contemporary Africa is to proclaim with our lives and deeds the hope of an alternative society in which God is king, in the midst of an apparently hopeless situation that reduces people to powerlessness. The church should follow the ex-

ample of her Lord and concentrate on healing and changing people in small groups and transforming them into humble, honest, caring and loving women and men. They, in turn, may then go out "... to bring good news to the humble, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to those in prison; to proclaim a year of the Lord's favour ..." (Is. 61:1f.) Ulrich Duchrow in his striking book: *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, quotes these captivating lines from N.Lohfink:

> "God wants to change all societies in the world, and he sets before their eyes an alternative society — the people of God. This universalising happens via a pilgrimage of the peoples. It requires one changed society to trigger it off, and its object is further social change ... what is new in the New Testament, as opposed to the whole history of the salvation God had wrought previously in Israel, is the claim that now the end seems to be at hand. Final hopes seem about to be met."

The power of the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection and victory over death is making provision for the life of all and for sharing like sisters and brothers. According to Acts 4:34 there was in fact no one poor among them.

Today we speak without thinking about "rich" or "poor" churches, and probably accept this, in contrast with the Acts of the apostles, as normal for the Church of God. Jesus Christ called us to proclaim the gospel's concrete social, economic and political alternative.

The Times of Zambia (Nov. 4, 1997) reporting on the tenth World Productivity Congress in Santiago, Chile (Oct. 5), quoted the president of the Pan-African Productivity Association as saying: "When one studies the economic statistics of Africa, one's first reaction is that if Africa were an organisation, it could well have had a slogan: 'Poverty is our business'! It appears as if Africa is expert at creating and maintaining poverty, dreams of better housing, clothing, food and education."

This is harsh and I really do not like it. What about the colonial exploitation of Africa and the oppression, killings and taking into slavery of her people? But is this harsh statement by the president of the Pan-Africa Productivity Association devoid of all truth? I do not think so. Our salvation will start with honest, open and courageous self-criticism. Such self-criticism is called for in the church, as is the confession of sins, followed by repentance, forgiveness and renewal. Africa needs a new beginning from stagnation in poverty, ignorance and unfulfilled dreams into life and abundance.

To achieve this, all people in church and society with whom God is pleased should join hands and address the right issues.

The mission of the church in God's world is not empty words but God's action of liberation and renewal. When the imprisoned John sent his disciples to Jesus with the question: "Are you the one John said was going to come, or should we expect someone else?", Jesus did not start writing a theological dissertation on the messiah. He told them to look around and to SEE what was happening and HEAR what was said. Renewal and redemption was not written down in expensive books which the poor will never afford to buy, but it was DONE. Luke writes: "At that very time Jesus cured many people of their sicknesses, diseases, and evil spirits, and gave sight to many blind people" (Lk. 7:21)

Photo: © Peter Williams - WCC

The dilemma of our times is that much is being said and written, but little or nothing is being done for renewal and redemption of humanity.

If the millions of documents on the redemption and renewal of humanity were bread and medicine, hunger and disease would have been eradicated long ago from the face of the earth. There is, for example, a huge gap between promises made to effectively address poverty in our world and the progress actually made. This Urban Rural Mission perspective from the book *A Community Of Clowns* compiled by Hugh Lewin (pages 154-155) describes the mission of God brilliantly:

The dilemma of our times is that much is being said and written, but little or nothing is being done for renewal and redemption of humanity.

The scriptures witness very clearly to Jesus' teaching that mission is not so much something we say, but something we do. "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but [the one] who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 14:21). The apostolic church emphasised this fundamental characteristic of the Christian life: "Be doers of the word" (James 1:22). Anything less is pseudo-gospel, the tragic delusion of a "pharisaical faith".

Mission is the action of Christ, and the action of Christ is the action of love. Love is the heart of mission. "If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

It is in the context of the practice of this truth that the New Testament command to proclaim the gospel must be understood. When Paul speaks about being sent "to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17), he is speaking from experience and practice of bearing the cross, of walking with Jesus.

The Bangkok World Mission Conference of 1973 acknowledged that there can be different "entry points" into the process of total liberation. But if mission is to be authentic it cannot remain at the "entry point" of traditional "evangelism". Former WCC general secretary Emilio Castro writes:

> "Even as concern for peace in Vietnam is not the whole of salvation, so also telling the story of Jesus is not the whole of salvation, unless in both cases we point with our words and our deeds beyond those particular emphases, to the total dynamics of the kingdom of God."

While it is true that, according to the gospel story, Jesus began by proclaiming a message about his kingdom, the heart of the message does not ultimately lie in what he said, but in who he was and what he did. The proclamation is his cross and resurrection. It is his love poured out in his life and death which validates and gives life and power to his spoken word. This is the ultimate evangelising act. "As the kernel and centre of his good news, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses men."

Mission is action directed at this task and purpose of God; involving oneself in this struggle is the essence of Christian response. Failure to be involved with Christ where people are in pain inevitably leads to a lopsided Gnostic theology — as if people are saved by right knowledge (orthoteaching) rather than by right action — Godly action (orthopraxis).

The fact remains that weak involvement leads to weak theology. It leads to that dangerous dualism that would separate one's religious being from one's secular reality, and so perpetuate a false consciousness about the nature of sin and oppression which Christ came to destroy. Real involvement, on the other hand, leads to a truly incarnation biblical theology and to an authentic understanding and practice of mission. Mission is essentially living the Christian life with Jesus, in solidarity with humanity. Mission is the task of leavening the lump of God's creation, the human community. The content of this action is the life of the kingdom — making actual the reality of Christ's Lordship in the life of the world. This is our story and we tell it by living it.

The mission of the Church of God in contemporary Africa is to give practical expression to our sense of freedom, a sharing community and solidarity inspired by our faith in Yahweh. The world around **must want to be like the church**. The church is and should be the hope for life today and the future for Africa. Yes, she is today the "remnant" and the "stump" which the prophets predicted.

She is sent out by her Lord to form, as Ulrich Duchrow terms it, a **contrast society and a counter culture** and by doing that, to transform one corner of darkness and despair into a shining light of hope. In that little corner of hope, the economic injustices can be levelled out. The world will be taught by seeing the moving away from wealth accumulation to wealth sharing. The economy will serve the people and not the other way round. The approach will focus on ser-

vice of people and the earth. Economic life will be organised in such a way that it enhances rather than destroys the environment and safeguards natural resources for the use of future generations.

This little corner of light and hope is not exclusive and stagnant. It is from here that the people out there in the world are to be gathered, beginning with the poor, excluded and oppressed, with the aim of embracing the whole world with love, justice, peace and joy, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and putting an end to hypocrisy and lies, and to unjust relationships between nations, people and between men and women.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We must turn away from a selfish demand for power and honour and invest the power given to us by God and the people in service of the people. This great continent is calling, with tears of blood, for a new common vision of one Africa and one family of sisters and brothers, where justice, freedom, development, prosperity and peace will be the basis and objective of all our words and actions.

This means that we, especially in leadership positions in the church and governments, must commit ourselves with all our resources and time for an Africa where people will be peace-makers and not war-lords; a continent where all will join efforts to entrench the practices of democracy, accountable administration and the rule of law; a continent in which the poor, the marginalised and the discriminated will be lifted from the dust and mud of suffering and dehumanisation. We can and are able to make this vision a reality for good governance, completely divorced from corruption.

When we look around for signs of hope with which we can begin the new millennium, the picture looks very dark. But experience teaches us that it does not help to curse the darkness. **Let us light the candle.** Yes, the candle of hope for our children and the generations which will be born, live and work in the new millennium.

GOD BLESS AFRICA!

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This article is extracted from a speech given during the World Council of Churches pre-Assembly meeting in Windhoek, Namibia, November-December 1997.

Dr Zephania Kameeta is a Lutheran theologian, member of parliament, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly in Namibia. He is one of the prominent church leaders who was very actively involved in the struggle for liberation in Namibia.

ECHOES INTERVIEWS KONRAD RAISER,

GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

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Echoes: We are recording this interview in Zimbabwe where you have been having discussions about the forthcoming Assembly. What is in your mind as you look forward to December?

KR: I think that people in Zimbabwe are beginning to realise that the Assembly is a unique opportunity for them. It took them some time to realise that. It was far away. The WCC is relatively far away and is not very tangible. But in all the conversations I have had here, with the heads of churches, with the Catholic Bishops Conference, with journalists and individuals, the interest was particularly to see how the present situation in Africa and in the African churches might be reflected in the Assembly, and how the Assembly in turn might make a contribution to the search for a new orientation in Africa. This is particularly alive in Zimbabwe at the present time. The country is obviously at a crossroads, and there is a feeling that a new orientation is needed. The churches feel there is a great expectation that they might contribute to shaping this new orientation. They, in turn, begin to expect some encouragement and support from the Assembly.

E: In the past you have said we must look at Africa with new eyes.

KR: I have said that in several contexts and here in Zimbabwe as well, looking back at the first time an assembly took place in Africa, in Nairobi in 1975. That was in the middle of the liberation struggle, at least as far as southern Africa was concerned. The struggle in Angola had just concluded and we were far from where we are now. At that time, liberation was the key word.

Now, as we are preparing to meet in Harare, the key term in Africa is reconstruction. Reconstructing Africa from what has been left behind after these years of struggle; reconstructing Africa after what has been the result of 20 or 30 years of development policies steered and governed by models, concepts and regulations imposed from outside. What has been left behind in countries like Zimbabwe after a period of economic structural adjustment which has not improved the situation of the people but has led them now to say very openly that they have been squeezed to a point where it is no longer possible and things must change. But there is also the realisation that change can only be brought about if the African people, including the churches, begin to gain confidence in their own resources rather than expecting the solutions to come from outside.

E: How can those of us who will come to the Assembly, this great gathering of the Christian family, make a contribution to the process of reconstruction?

KR: First of all, I think the WCC, as a world body, can help African partners, churches and people, understand that their seeming failure to keep up with the process of development is not, in the first instance, their own fault. It is not that the Africans have not worked hard enough. It is not that the Africans have

not tried enough. But they were up against a dynamic, a system, that has consistently worked against the interests of the people. That system is presently being referred to as "globalisation". For many, it is represented by the network of global transnational corporations, by international economic and financial institutions like the World Bank, the IMF and now the World Trade Organisation. These bodies have established rules, criteria and procedures that are being imposed on countries in Africa as the condition for receiving assistance and aid. At the same time, as a consequence, the priorities for political and economic planning are more and more out of tune with people's immediate needs.

Therefore, the Assembly will have to speak a very clear Christian witness to those who are in the seats of power and will have to defend the basic principles of justice and human rights. Take, for example, the discussion about the so-called Multilateral Agreement on Investment. If approved, this would wipe out two or three decades of development efforts, not only on the part of governments and international agencies, but especially those efforts to which non-governmentals like the churches have contributed enormously. The Assembly will have to defend the legitimacy and continued necessity for an approach to development that puts human community, people, first before any of the narrowly conceived demands of the market, effectiveness and international competition.

E: The Assembly is a place where the WCC and its member churches do their business. Is there a danger, or a possibility, that they will merely do their business and no more in this place called Africa?

KR: In shaping the programme of the Assembly, deliberate care has been taken to include several places where participants will come into direct interaction

Photo: © Jonas Ekström - WCC

with the reality of peoples' lives in Zimbabwe, and in Africa generally. It is not only a plenary session on Africa, where many of the results of WCC's programmatic focus on Africa will be brought to public visibility. It is not only a welcome celebration by the churches and Christian community. There will be visits to local congregations, and thus a possibility for visitors to come into direct live contact with the people of this country . Of course it will be limited. But we know from earlier assemblies that such visits to local communities have sometimes been what was most vividly remembered and where genuine encounters took place. All these activities will be shared in the reporting about the Assembly.

There is also the special feature of this Assembly — the open space in the middle of the programme: the Padare. This is where churches, ecumenical groups and partner organisations have been invited to share their experiences, insights and expectations in a way that has not been pre-structured by the WCC. We expect this will result in a strengthening and broadening of ecumenical networks of solidarity between churches in Africa and churches and ecumenical networks in other parts of the world.

E: The churches in Zimbabwe, and indeed in Africa, issued an invitation to the WCC to come to Africa for this Assembly. Do you think they were actually challenging the WCC in that invitation?

KR: I am not sure whether they actually intended a challenge. They wanted the WCC to come close. They cherished WCC's solidarity during the years of struggle, which is particularly true in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa. They know what the WCC has meant to them; they know the WCC has made a difference. They hope the WCC will continue to make a difference to the lives of the churches and the people here. So I think we have done right to receive it as a challenge, even if it was not formulated in that way.

We should see in this invitation a request to recommit ourselves; to renew those solidarity links which go back more than 40 years and have been an important part of the African people's history over the period of decolonisation and liberation from colonialism and racism.

E: It has been estimated that two-thirds of the people who come as official delegates will be coming to an assembly for the first time and that a large proportion of them will never have been to Africa before. What do you say to them?

KR: You have to come with an open mind. You have to leave behind many of the images and prejudices that a certain kind of reporting about Africa may have formed in your mind. You must be prepared first of all to meet persons; to meet brothers and sisters in the same faith. You must be open to perceive the multifold realities of life in Africa, not simply hunger, disease and suffering. You have to be prepared to be drawn into what is probably one of the most vital forms of living and expressing the Christian faith today. You may want to be reminded that many of us, in trying to carry on our ecumenical commitment in other parts of the world, have been nourished by the witness of Christian people in Africa, who have maintained hope in a situation where there was seemingly no hope. By singing their songs and receiving their prayers, we have been nourished in our hope. I therefore wish that, together, we will be able to give a credible witness of what it means to be a community of hope.

E: I am not addressing this question to you as general secretary but as Konrad Raiser. What are you looking forward to when you come to the Assembly?

KR: I look forward to the great gathering of the people of God. Each of the three assemblies I have participated in was, in its own way, an overwhelming manifestation of the fact that this people of God really exists; that, in spite of everything that separates us, we belong together with a sense of immediacy that I have found nowhere else.

Secondly, I look forward to the opportunity of rekindling and strengthening that sense of common calling of which the Basis of the WCC speaks. We have allowed the contours of ecumenism to become somewhat fluid, covering all sorts of things. I think the time has come, as we approach the end of this century and face a new millennium, to be much more clearly focussed on our ecumenical commitment. This Assembly comes at a moment where, from very many encounters I have had over these last years, I receive the message that we have to renew that basic ecumenical commitment. We have to make it a commitment not only by the churches and their official leaders, to something that shapes our Christian lives and the ways in which together we try to be the Church. It is a God-sent opportunity that this Assembly is so close to the symbolic date of the year 2000. So, I expect this Assembly to bring a message that will be heard far beyond the place in which we will be meeting.

E: Do you expect the Assembly to change you?

KR: I think the ecumenical movement has already changed me and it will continue to do so. I am open to many surprises at this Assembly, positive and negative ones. But I hope the Assembly will open a new road that does not end when we leave Harare, but with renewed energy and a sense of expectation, sends us back on our ecumenical way.

ARRIVING ON YOUR FEET:

Guidelines for a sensitive visitor

by Amba Ewudziwa

Photo: © Peter Williams - WCC

TOUCH DOWN

When you touch the soil of Africa, it will probably be at an international airport. If it is at Jan Smuts you will probably not know that you have entered Africa. The world has become a village, sporting similar architecture everywhere. All cities have concrete skyscrapers, but do not be deceived: this is also 'where the people live'. By the way, there are people in Africa, not just jungle and lions and giraffes and exotic birds and monkeys and waterfalls and caves. It is the people whom I would like to concentrate on, as the tourist guides would have told you of the geographic features and historic places that are a must for visitors. Most airlines unfortunately fly you over the Sahara at times and points that allow you to miss one of earth's most spectacular vistas of sand without end. Note, however, that even this desert does support human life.

If you touch down at any other airport south of the Sahara, two things will assure you that you have left home. Most officials are Black, and the airport spaces are smaller. Otherwise globalisation makes it hard to know you left home. Coca-cola and American Express billboards; jeans, Evian, McDonald's, maybe even Kentucky Fried Chicken, Chicken Licken and Pizza Hut may greet you in the city. There are cars everywhere, maybe old, but then Africa makes no cars. But the makes are familiar: Peugeot, Lada, VW, Nissan, Toyota, Honda and Hyundai. If you passed through Benin Republic, you will be homesick for the Netherlands: all Africa's cycles congregate here, though increasingly they have become motorised and therefore environmentally unfriendly. But so is the flaring of gas, if you stopped in Nigeria's Niger delta states.

As in most of the Third World, and a couple of Western cities that I know, we in Africa do live in houses, from cardboard boxes to elegantly thatched round huts, to mansions complete with uniformed

security guards at the gate and dogs to match. That is the range of life-styles you should expect in Africa.

If you stayed in Ghana, your eyes may have caught sight of something you probably do not see in your country — everything is sold at our curbsides on a regular basis. We live off the cast-offs of our neighbours on the continents to the north and the west; old clothes, car engines, old fridges, freezers and TVs and cookers and sinks. You begin to wonder "why?" On the other hand you can shop for every new gadget and dog chains and snacks, while caught up in the traffic jam in Accra: pop-corn, roasted peanuts, plantain chips, cold drinks and apples. The same applies to the "Go Slow" in Lagos, and you wonder "why?"

In Africa there is no lack of people ready to help carry for you, take you to places instead of giving you erudite descriptions that end with "you can't miss it". In most parts of Africa, people still have time for people. At the airports, however, it is something else. People need to eat and the airport provides them a place where they can sell their services. At the airports people hustle. It is a place to pick up a few coins and loose change from arrivals and departures. After all, if you can afford to buy an air ticket, you must be rich or at least you can afford to part with a little money for services you could perform yourself, like rolling your carry-on luggage (though maybe not to catch a taxi if you are not met — few African airports are friendly in this respect).

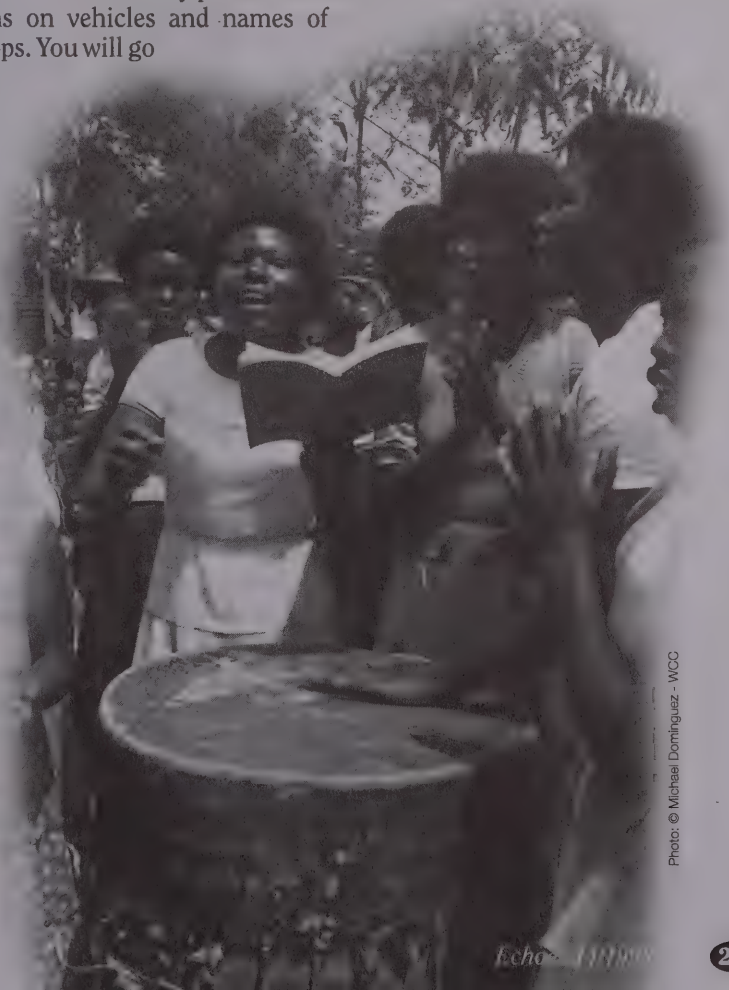
In most parts of Africa, people still have time for people.

Away from airports, Africa still presents a veneer of cosmopolitanism, a slice of the global village. We speak a Babel of languages, including those of our erstwhile colonisers and trading partners. We speak English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, even Italian, German, Swedish and Japanese. Africans love other peoples' languages; we have to study and use the master's tools. When we study or trade abroad we do not expect the host country to communicate with us in our own language. It is a question of power. Don't forget it is part of the colonial heritage. We had to, we were made to, learn the master's language so that the master could get on with the business of colonising without having to understand us in our own language. Sad to say, it was more or less the same with the majority of Christian missionaries to Africa, with the significant exception of those who learnt to speak our languages and to "reduce" them to written text. Our bi-racial personal names and dual names for our cities attest to this cultural invasion.

ENCOUNTERING AFRICA

Why are you going to Africa? OK you had no choice. If you did, you would not go to Africa where AIDS and Ebola, cholera and malaria stand ready to shorten your life. If you had the choice, you would avoid the continent where people are hungry for food and human rights, a people at war with one another and where suffering has made a home. If you had the choice you would rather leave intact the images of Africa from the National Geographic, tourist brochures, sensational documentaries and centuries-old travellers' tales and pencil sketches. But you had no choice, you are a delegate of your church to the WCC's VIIIth Assembly in the jubilee year of its foundation, and the event is in Harare. If that is all there is to it, then maybe you should cede your seat to another, or perhaps simply don't bother to read on.

You can participate in the Assembly without reading this, except that you'd better be ready to encounter forms of Christian worship totally unfamiliar to you — jubilant and deeply engaging. You may not have time to go behind the liturgy to the theology and spirituality, but walking along our streets, you will find evidence of how Christian vocabulary permeates the slogans on vehicles and names of shops. You will go



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away puzzled, asking yourself, "What a strange sort of Christianity is this?" Well, strange or exotic, it is growing and it is the rock of salvation for many that you meet, if you care to meet people. If you are not in Africa to engage Africans you should not read on.

MEETING AFRICANS

The global clothing of Africa shrouds the Africa that Africans know. The four- or five-star hotels, motels and guest-houses, are for visitors, mostly business people, tourists and conferenciers. Few Africans, nationals or otherwise, can afford them unless they have an expense account. Few Africans can even afford to "Have a Coke", not to say "steak, chicken and chips", at these places. Like the airports, they are for tourists and the few Africans who do business usually have partners outside Africa. Few Africans fly to spend holidays abroad, and those who can rarely go to another African country. Our faces are turned north-west and when travelling in our own countries, we "naturally" seek out family and friends to stay with. Before hotels and motels there were homes.

Photo: © WCC

Recently the take-away food culture has begun to invade us. I mean the type of fast foods that comes in styrofoam and plastic and paper containers. At least in West Africa, we always had 'take-away' and 'fast foods' on our streets or delivered to our door-steps and homes by hawkers, but they were in more environmentally friendly containers, even though at times some were hygienically questionable. That culture continues. In this, as in many circumstances, the universe of the traditional village continues in the global village. The adventurous visitor anywhere in the world also has to be prudent and discerning about what he or she eats. The street food culture is all so familiar, it could be Bangkok or Manila.

Behind the global face is the Africa of the Africans, which you need to encounter. It is exciting, pulsating, vivid, loud, especially if your first stop is West Africa. This is the Africa that makes the Akan of Ghana say "*ohoho te se abofra*" (the stranger is like a child); for the Yoruba of Nigeria, people who arrive in a country "on their feet" are not children of the soil and have to work diligently at becoming accepted. You must land "on your head" to be a child of the soil. This means you must be born in Africa to know Africa. Although this is something of an exaggeration, there is yet more than a grain of truth in it. So let us begin to ask polite questions. Let us listen intently to those we talk to and not take anything or anybody for granted.

You will receive information on climate and clothing. But you should ask why the airlines land their planes in the evenings. Do you remember that it was in the cool of the evening that God strolled in the garden of Eden? Most of Africa is hot and, like everywhere else, is getting hotter. This heat, with its limitations and opportunities, is what is basic to Africa. In most places, nature is severe and reigns supreme, unmitigated by technology: no irrigation, no air-conditioning, no heating in winter; lots of mining and lumbering and land-mining that makes farming impossible and threatens life and limb. Remember this is also the climate that produces the beaches, waterfalls, caves and wildlife that bring holiday-makers to the continent, and supports human life and cultures that we call African.

Yes, we have seen wars and prodigious destruction of land and property. Deportation, exile and displacement of thousands of human beings has marked the profile of Africa for the past half-millennium. These are harsh facts, the roots of our poverty. But there are other historical factors which we need not go into because they are so well known and, unfortunately, associated with our culture of hospitality to new arrivals. The results are what we struggle with, and which you too may witness. Why, we ask ourselves, with all the petroleum, gold, diamonds and

other resources we have, do we present such a miserable aspect and why do we have to display our poverty right at the gates of our cities?

The minimum wage in Accra is 3000 cedis per day, just a little over one USA dollar, but the global market sells products at global prices, unless you settle for second-hand everything. Even so, you need to supplement your minimum wage, if indeed you have that. So the odd pickings at the airport become essential. At Kotoka International Airport, Accra, the self-appointed porters will tell you "Let me help you, we are here because of you". How very true in more than one sense. You have to review the old analysis, for Africans are not poor because they are lazy. People work hard, but cannot make ends meet, let alone build up capital.

What is most essential to remember, however, is that people are not just "the poor". They are people, persons. Meet the people of Africa and you will encounter as many cultures as there are tongues. Yet, in my opinion, the unity of African culture transcends the multiplicity of particularities. But that is for you to verify by experience. Don't go by pigmentation of the human skin, though it is the most obvious and the preferred criterion of racists and the insecure at heart. Meet people, persons, human beings with frowns and smiles, speech and song and silence.

My plea is that you move from the popular pictures of "decay" to see the making of African cultures by a living and lively and dynamic people.

WHAT IS AFRICA?

It is a question of identity! In Africa we argue among ourselves whether there is an entity called Africa, since we did not name our continent. We were named by others, and the name has stuck. After all the name "Christian" was given to the first followers of the Christ, and it has stuck. The Akan of Ghana would prefer to call the continent **Abibirman**, the nation of the Blacks, as would the Ethiopians. But we have settled for Africa because otherwise we would get a thousand names for this one space on earth.

The next question is: where does Africa begin and where does it end? This is indeed a geo-political as well as for some, a religious question. The islands of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean coasts have taken different options or, rather, have had different options taken for them. Recent politics have welded the Republic of South Africa firmly into Africa; nations north of the Sahara and bordering the southern coast of the Mediterranean sea have honoured the geographical fact by inscribing themselves into the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

What remains to account for is the status of the lands of the Red Sea. Ali A. Mazrui of Tanzania in his *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* [Little, Brown & Co. Boston, Toronto, 1986] breaks with the European geographic designations by including the Arabic peninsula in Africa. After all, he argues, the Suez canal was created by Europeans so Africans have a right to put a bridge across it and restore the ancient links with both pre-Islamic Arabia and the rest of the "Holy land" that have been strengthened by the fact of Islam. Egypt is definitely Africa, and so is Ethiopia, even if Western scholarship finds it unpalatable to admit this. Do read Mazrui and view the series of video documentaries on Africa authored by Basil Davidson who, among other writings, has written *The African: An Entry to Cultural History* [London & Harlow Longman 1969]. There are Euro-American-centred films and documentaries on Africa you can forget, but not these videos.

Three of the fifteen chapters of Mazrui discuss Africa's identity. One deals with "Towards Cultural Synthesis" and the opening chapter answers the question "Where is Africa?" The introduction is entitled "A Celebration of Decay?" These are all issues of self-understanding that will inform your encounters in Africa. My plea is that you move from the popular pictures of "decay" to see the making of African cultures by a living and lively and dynamic people. Do I have to say that with all of the writings about Africa, you need openness and understanding? Remember you have landed on your feet. Maybe you are the non-smoker who, on entering a room full of smokers, is tempted to say immediately "Hey folks! Don't you smell the stench?" and even proceeds to open the windows. Critiques are necessary, but wait a minute. Africa has had her full share of saviours from out there and no longer waits for foreign messiahs.

What I am attempting here is to spell out a little more fully what I understand Konrad Raiser's plea to be about. Responding to a question on what he would say to people who have never been to Africa before the Assembly, he said: "You have to come with an open mind... *be prepared first of all to meet people*". But can visitors "leave behind the images or prejudices"?

Or will they come looking for confirmation? What does it mean to "meet people" and to realise that they have many other religions? That there are many faces of Christianity in Africa? You will become aware that Christianity is a translatable religion and that your version of it is not the definitive universal model for the whole globe for all times and places.

My single directive is "sensitivity" — obvious daily courtesies and manners, awareness of the sensitivities and sensibilities of the people you see and those you encounter and converse with. Let me illustrate:

> A fifty-year-old African woman was walking along the streets of an English city suburb with a European man of sixty-plus. He was a well known and respected, even admired ecumenical colleague, and the conversation had no hint of the personal. So imagine her astonishment when he passed his fingers through her hair, ruffled it like we often do with children and said: "You are quite a girl". Why did he do this? But African politeness took over. She just looked at him embarrassed, and the conversation went on as if nothing had happened.

A fifty-year-old African woman does not like to be called a girl, any more than the domestic staff in our homes want to be called "boys", even though few balk at the terminology "boy's quarters" in which they and their families live. Both are vestiges of the colonial, missionary and racist era of Africa's relation with the Western world.

Secondly, even if this was a girl, passing your hands through another person's hair is an intimacy that cannot be inflicted upon colleagues and acquaintances, not to speak of chance encounters. It may be considered a show of affection to children, but a fifty-year-old woman cannot be treated as a child. Behind this thoughtless act is a culture of disrespect for the dignity and humanity of the African which is hard to forgive. Africans are given to being polite and hospitable, but having suffered at the hands of such racists, and at the hands of people who take politeness for weakness, after throwing off the political bondage, we have become less so. We no longer automatically give way to White people or the aged. We do not walk away from insult and conflict. We "talk back". We did before but few heard us, so now we tend to make people listen.

Listen to this second story:

> Once in a shop in Cambridge UK, a White mother turned beet-root red when her three-year-old ran her forefinger along my arm and then looked searchingly at her finger. I bent over and said "No, it does not rub off. Where I come from everybody is like me, even the little girls like you are my colour". I ran my finger along her arm, looked at it, and smiled. The mother began to apologise and I waved her off with: "Never mind, she is still exploring the world".

Many Africans will tell you about similar experiences that show the ignorance about Africans that exists mainly because most people outside our continent have not taken us seriously enough to bother to learn about us. Now you are heading for Africa, you can no longer neglect this educational need.

SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The stranger is like a child. But if you really must feel African hair, do ask permission to touch! And now, let us look at a couple of the parameters of African culture which may help you to develop sensitivity.

We shall let Ali Mazrui, a Tanzanian, guide us to save you from my Akan-centeredness. In 1997, I heard Mazrui speak on culture in Africa and was impressed by his insight that the contemporary struggle in Africa is in the nature of cultural liberation. He speaks of a heritage that was cultural and civilizational, and argues that "the impact of the West on Africa has been political and economic, that is, civilizational" (civilization being "culture which has endured, expanded, innovated and been elevated to new moral sensibilities"). The early missionaries brought "civilization" to Africa; this was meant to make Africa into Europe.

The Euro-centric "civilizing" mission took the form of condemning all that was African. Elizabeth Isichei comments on the condemnation of Ganda domestic architecture: "Persistently, missionaries condemned circular houses, and advocated rectangular ones. The fault of the round house was that there was no internal walls and only one opening..." That was a cultural challenge. Today, rondavels with thatched roofs and many openings abound in Ghana, as in other parts of tropical and southern Africa. Round houses are in vogue; as Africa's gift to global architecture, their many modifications are welcome and appreciated by Africans too.

With it, this "civilizing" mission carried Western culture beyond the architectural. Mazrui defines culture as "a system of inter-related values active enough to influence and condition perception, judgement, communication and behaviour in a given society". As a visitor to Africa, try to read some novels written by members of the societies you shall visit. Hienemann's Educational Books African Writers Series will be a good source of information and culture. So far, Africa's scholars have not taken religion and politics seriously as cultural factors, observes Mazrui. More than that, they have accepted the Western view that Christianity and Islam are African religions while, for a long time, it ignored Africa's primal religion. "'Old Africa' will surely pass away," they said.

Photo: © Ulrich Schweizer - WCC

Some of our children do not know our folktales and our customs. They do not know our festivals except for the dancing and the drumming, which they neither understand nor appreciate. Our children are "modern". My fear is that most are like people "who take out their stomach and fill the void with straw". Mazrui sees the dangers.

Many more work to prevent their societies from lacking distinct culture and having nothing worth contributing to global culture. When people greet you with "Dimeela", "Jambo", "Ekaabo"; when they wear their African clothing and invite you spontaneously to share what they are eating, you are witnessing part of the refusal to be absorbed into the "Hi!" culture. You are witnessing the process of cultural liberation. Among ourselves as Africans, we have refused the culture of impatience with greetings, but are still in the process of developing local forms of "Hi!" for the biblical "Hail!".

ON CLOTHING AND LANGUAGE

In human culture clothing provides easy identification of provenance. She is in a kimono, she must be Japanese; she is in a saree, she must be Pakistani, Indian or Sri Lankan. She wears a bubu, she must be West African. She is in buba and iro, she must be Yoruba from Nigeria or the Republic of Benin. And for each case I mean "she", for women more than men have everywhere been more faithful to their national attires. Men have opted for more globalised forms as the youth have adopted the American jeans and T-shirt. In dress culture and fashion, Africa is like anywhere else. In this case, the heritage is more than triple. Aside from the Western and Islamic and Indigenous, there are many Asian fashions, as Africa's links with Asia goes way back. This is especially visible in multi-cultural South Africa.

In clothing, one would have said anything goes except that, periodically, African societies and even governments clamp down on women in trousers, mini-skirts and transparent clothing. Watch out for this sexism. In Islamic areas, it is religious culture to be "decently" clothed, and some women are veiled. Throughout Africa, women's head-fashion includes elaborate head-gears (*duku/gele*), but women's hair may also be close-cropped or done up in braids and plaits. These days, even the erstwhile *mpesempese* (rasta, the biblical 'Nazarite') hairdos are worn by both men and women. You are bound to find young men in braids — a sign that times change. In Africa patterns, whether in cloth or on the head, are named and the naming and symbolism are known locally.

Photo: © Don Edkins - WCC

Those who ask will learn — a veritable case of "the stranger is like a child".

In the "Christian culture", Victorian and missionary legacy has prescribed forms of "decent" dressing for going to church. Some congregations insist that women cover their heads in church, following Paul. If you forget, you may be handed a head scarf at the door. Also note that Africans keep the notion of "Sunday best", so though not wealthy, they will consider it an insult if you show up in church unkempt and tattered in a bid to show solidarity. Dress for church as you would for the Assembly's ordinary plenary session and you will be fine. Wear your clericals, especially if you are a woman; we need more visibility for women clergy. (Thank you). The cultural conquest clothing that Mazrui refers to applies mostly to African men. Women have given themselves more flexibility. The "safari suit", the so called "political suit" the "danshiki" the more formal *Agbada* of West Africa, are the men's response to the globalisation of men's clothing. Otherwise it seems that in men's fashions, the whole world has gone western. You have little need to feel self-conscious. Basically if you feel comfortable, it is likely not to cause offense.

On language, I agree with Mazrui that Africa has experienced a cultural conquest by the Western world. I would have added the Arabic world, but for Mazrui's inclusion of the Arabian peninsula in Africa. Many Africans said to be "illiterate" are in fact literate in Arabic which, by Mazrui's definition, becomes the only African language to gain global currency. Locally, however, there are many more African languages, written and used officially by governments and — more relevant for our subject — by churches. You will hear African languages in the streets, meet them in church as hymns, lyrics, biblical texts, extemporary prayers and sermons. But don't worry, we are more aware of your need to know what is going on than you are of ours when we travel abroad. We have our colonial languages, as stated above, and we shall accompany you so you do not get lost. We may even surprise you by using the hymnal and liturgical book your church has replaced.

The European language conquest of Africa shows up in the way the Roman alphabet is used in writing all African languages, making them more or less readable by most of our visitors. You will see what I mean if you have been in Asia and have been unable to read road signs or a paper on a news stand because it could as well be written in hieroglyphics. In Africa, you will find *Time* magazine, *Newsweek* and African versions like *Africa Now, Africa Watch* and *West Africa*. There are very few women's magazines and even fewer that are "glossy". In Ghana look out for *Obaa Sima* and in Tanzania the media women's publication... Music is mixed and rhythm has universal appeal, so that is a common language for us all. Hollywood will be on your TV screen as sure as CNN and other globalised TV enterprises.

A language-related issue that we begin to take for granted is naming. Personal names in Africa were revolutionised by the arrival of the West, of Christianity and by the spread of Islam. But naming is a question of identity, and many Africans have asserted their Africanness by dropping their European names as we call "Christian" names in Ghana. As Mazrui has noted, "Until Christianity and Islam came to Africa, personal names generally were part of the collective uniqueness of each ethnic group". Now Africans use Arabic, European and Semitic names and identify themselves by Christian and Islamic names. Only in the family names can you still read the cultural affinity and, at times, even the religious history, of a family. A Yoruba name that has *Ogun* or *Ifa* in the first part is definitely religious, related to the primal religion. It continues as identification for people who are Christian, affirming Africa's ability to cope with multiplicity without being divisive.

As in all matters cultural, surnames are not indigenous, but now are quite at home in Africa. Men's surnames have become the roots of patriarchal naming in Africa, shaping family trees on the European model. The sexism involved in naming women after their husbands is also un-African, but now some African women will hear nothing of keep-

ing their own birth names. They will insist on being designated Mrs, and not the Ms which, in the English-speaking world, hides one's marital status for women as Mr has done for men for ages. Here, one needs to be reminded that *ohoho* te se *abofra*. Many people in Africa stand on ceremony and are addressed by more formal designations, including titles. Ms Araba Smith would not be called Araba, nor Ms Smith if she is married. She would have to be Mrs Araba Smith or Mrs Smith. If she has a doctorate or a chieftaincy, she would be Dr Araba Smith, or Chief Araba Smith and, if both, she might even be Chief Mrs Dr Araba Smith. It is better to err on the side of excessive formality than on the side of undue familiarity. Certainly if someone tells you he is called Modupe, don't ask, "may I call you Modu?" Leave him to say, "you may call me Dupe".

FOOD CULTURE AND LIFE-STYLE

What you observed upon arrival will become a reality once you actually become hungry. Europeanisation and Americanisation are everywhere. You will eat and drink Portuguese, Spanish, French, complete with salad, wine, cheese and liqueur, in places where Europeans made their homes and tried to influence the food culture of the Africans. The life-styles of the Westernised members of Africa's upper social echelons — who used to be called the *evolués*, the elite (in my language *pe buroni aye*, "would like to be white", said with tongue in cheek) — is very definitely Western. But even among them, you may be treated to typical local cuisine. In this matter the sweetness of the pudding is literally in the eating, and the variety is such that I have to leave it to your imagination and the judgement of your palate. But please do remember that food is definitely a cultural matter, and don't go turning up your nose at what others esteem a delicacy.

Generally in Africa, much is based on corn or maize, tubers, and rice. You will find Irish potatoes in some places as this food item, like rice, has been very well globalised, all sorts of meat and poultry and fish, tropical fruits that have made it to Western markets including pineapples and bananas that taste and smell like pineapples and bananas. But not all Africa is tropical, so you will find temperate fruits as well, especially apples.

Northern and Southern Africa will have indigenous wines from grapes. Others will have imported versions for you, at a price, and every place will have its local brews of wines and beers from maize and palm and other plant sources. But an area of cultural conquest is soft-drinks: Coke and the Coca-Colonisation of the globe of course covers Africa. So does the "fantastic" Fanta, the "clear" Seven-Up and the Pepsi of the new generation. These, and the many others from Europe and North America, have successfully thwarted the mass production of indigenous local soft drinks. However, there is nothing more appropriate for your thirst in hot Africa than a glass of water... not too cold or you invite more sweat. Coke, and Pepsi, the "Coca-Colonisation of the world" is symbolic of a much wider process of Americanisation of humanity, says Mazrui. But be careful. You have just arrived "on your feet" and staring at Coca Cola adverts may step on sensitive toes. True, America and Europe compete for the soul of the African, but that soul remains stubbornly African in its etiquette.

PLEASED TO MEET YOU

Shaking hands on meetings seems to the a global practice. But hold it, the traditional Yoruba does not expect a handshake. Minors, male or female, kneel to adults and superiors, and women kneel to adult males and to other women of their own age-group. The kneeling etiquette is quite widespread in Africa, but locals generally do not expect visitors to follow this custom and would accept the universal handshake. The Akan expect a handshake with your right hand, and in a group, one is expected to greet each person starting from left to right. Note that, in most of Africa, it is rude to give or receive or point

Photo: © Peter Williams - WCC

Photo: © Peter Williams - WCC

at anything or anybody with your left hand. Don't tell me this is discrimination in a world where most people are, or are a made to be, right-handed. Few are strong enough to resist, and so few Africans write with their left hand. Funnily enough though, this is considered admirable even if counter-culture.

The traditional segregation into male/female for seating and grouping is kept in some congregations, so watch out when you go to church. Churches that practice this might still seat married couples together, and would tend to seat visitors together for visibility and ease of organisation. Proper behaviour in this regard becomes tenuous as it is an area of continual change in culture, demanding extreme sensitivity and a keen sense of observation of what the "locals" do.

Westernisms, Islamic expectations, and Indigenous norms exist side by side in the matter of sexual ethics. Christian fear of sexuality and sensuality demanded, and still demands a Victorian prudishness from the mid-nineteenth century from women, while since the mid-twentieth century Western secularism struggles to introduce permissiveness and openness about sexual preferences. African indigenous culture still balks at the latter. In Southern Africa, especially in Zimbabwe, this has become an open debate.

Unlike Christianity, African culture is overt about sexuality. The divinities are clearly male, female or androgenous. Our myths do not demonise sexuality and the human body is nothing to be ashamed of. Celibacy was rare, but honoured and we knew no homophobia until its globalisation hit Africa and put people's defences up about the need to procreate. We are now hearing over again, from both women and men, the same argument that African men use to defend polygamy which, in spite of Christian efforts to ridicule and eliminate it, persists as a respected form of marriage among African Muslims and others. Mazrui, our guide through African culture writes:

> "Very often men are polygamous less because they love women than because they love children. More important than the status of having several wives is the status of having many children".

At this juncture, I might add that population is a sensitive issue in Africa. Few appreciate the question "How many children do you have?" They will, if they want to, volunteer that information. We have become suspicious of the politicisation of the population question in the global arena. "There has to be room for all," Africans would say. For, after all, if the eagle has a perch, so does the humming bird. Population continues to be an area of silence in the churches, but when it is given voice it will be in condemnation of abortion, rape and incest. The first is controversial and the last two are condemned worldwide. In sexual

ethics relating, for example, to homosexuality and its accompanying homophobia, you will have to unravel for yourself the Akan conundrum, "The one who placed the sleeping mat on the pathway and the one who walked on it — who is to blame?" Whatever you do, don't vaunt your sexual preference. In Africa, it is still a private affair.

Whatever the situation, the traditional code of civility is not to cause offence, to show appreciation and to be hospitable. But don't count on this proper behaviour from all you meet. Many no longer shirk confrontation and controversy, and will demand an apology if their dignity is hurt. "We are a people who have suffered," says Bessie Head, and now many say "Enough is enough". Reciprocity is expected: in giving you receive. Sometimes, even in what should be business or administrative transactions, people expect you to give before you receive services. This is called bribery in the West. But in Africa, it is counted as a tradition, symbolised in how the tortoise walks — saying slowly and clearly: "Hand go! hand come; hand go; hand come." Don't be surprised if a perfect stranger should ask you at the airport, "What did you bring for us?" Travellers are expected to bring presents for the stay-at-homes. So just respond with, "I bring you greeting and peace," or "All my people greet you". You have "landed on your feet", but you have responded like an African.

WELCOME!
AKWAABA!
EKAABO!
BIENVENUE!

Amba Ewudziwa, better known to us as Mercy Amba Oduyoye, was a staff member of the WCC 1987-1994, the last three years as deputy general secretary.

FACING UP TO POWER AND GREED — THE CHALLENGE OF THE NEXT CENTURY

by Martin Khor

The world at the end of the 20th century is not as peaceful, or just, or nice, as we may have thought it would be when the Cold War ended.

Instead, the past few years have witnessed increasing economic turbulence, widening social inequalities and widespread feelings of insecurity and helplessness. The latest sign of the times is the outbreak of the East Asian financial crisis. Nations that had only a short while ago been hailed as economic miracles have had their currencies depreciated, millions thrown out of jobs as their economies sink as fast as the Titanic, and their poverty rates exploding together with social and political upheaval.

The countries affected were furious with powerful currency speculators and hedge funds for taking on the central banks and depreciating their currencies, and at the Northern countries' investment funds for, all at once, pulling their capital out — events that triggered off the tragedy of East Asia. Avoiding any responsibility, the G-7 nations and the International Monetary Fund instead tried to explain away the crisis by vilifying the affected countries for having the wrong policies and economic structures. As part of the conditions for the rescue packages for Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea, they insisted that the governments slash their budgets, raise interest rates, remove subsidies for essential items, and insisted that the economies be reformed to enable foreign companies to enter and take over whatever assets, companies and sectors they wanted.

But the crisis spread to more and more Asian countries. And then currency speculators shifted their attack to other regions. Russia, South Africa, East Europe, Latin America are now under threat.

Countries in the developing world are no longer able to have control over their currencies and financial systems. The destabilisation this causes is undermining their trade, investment and development prospects.

These latest events are only part of a series of developments that have combined to make the developing countries poor, dependent and helpless.

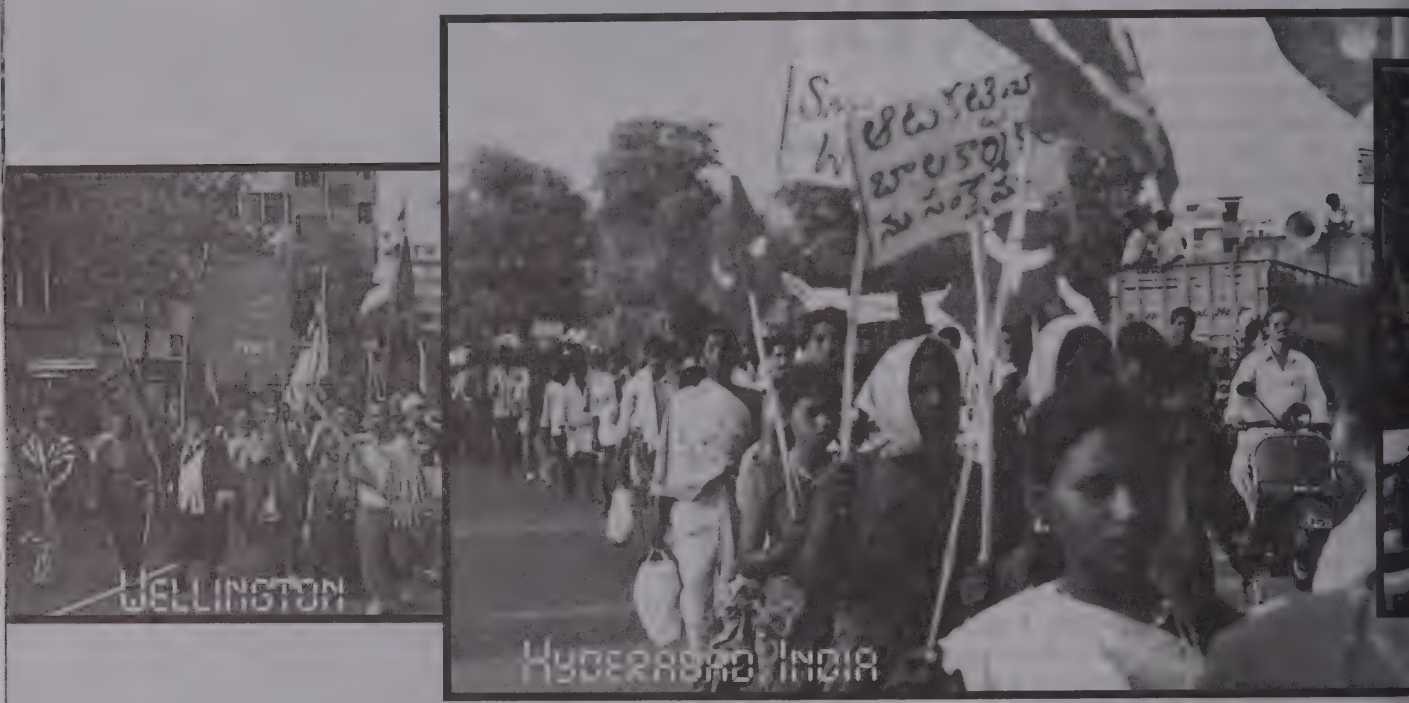
Much of Africa and Latin America have had two "lost decades" in which declining commodity prices and the external debt trap have bled their countries of resources and reduced them to the status of beggars.

The "structural adjustment" programmes, drawn up in Washington and imposed on the 80 or more indebted countries, were designed to make these countries repay the international banks as fully as possible, at the cost of people's incomes and governments' social budgets. The consequences of that strategy are now evident in increased poverty, unemployment, social ills and conflicts. The world is getting more and more into an apartheid-like situation, with the rich grabbing more wealth and the majority becoming more poor. The United Nations' Development Programme (UNDP) "Human Development Report" 1992 estimated that 20% of the world's population in the developed countries receive 83% of world income, whilst the 20% of people in the poorest countries receive only 1.4%. In 1989, the average income of the richest 20% of people was 60 times that of the poorest 20%; this has doubled from 30 times in 1950.

The UNDP's 1996 Report showed that, over the past three decades, only 15 countries enjoyed high growth whilst 89 countries are worse off than ten or more years ago. In 70 developing countries, the present income levels are less than in the 1960s and 1970s. And now, even some of the hitherto toasted East Asian countries have fallen: in Indonesia the poverty rate is rising from 20 to 50 percent in a year and the GNP will fall by up to 20 percent this year.

This is the ugly face of "globalisation". It is a term used by the international establishment as a clarion call to everyone to join in the materialistic rat-race, promoting the myth that free markets and unregulated corporations will interconnect countries and people of the world for everyone's mutual benefit.

The reality of globalisation-cum-liberalisation is financial turbulence, great divisions of wealth and income between and within nations, and the persistent poverty that we witness today.



If we were to examine honestly what has led to this state of affairs, we would have to conclude that it can be summed up in two words — power and greed.

Particularly after the Cold War ended, a great triumphalism pervaded the Western world. Those who wielded financial and corporate power worked through their governments and the international agencies to push even harder for policies and treaties that would remove remaining barriers to their ability to capture markets and natural resources to expand their empires and profits.

What the rich saw as "barriers" were in fact defence mechanisms (such as tariffs, or regulations and

conditions on the entry and operations of foreign companies, or rules controlling the free inflow and outflow of funds) set up by local communities and poorer countries to protect themselves from predatory foreign companies and financial operators.

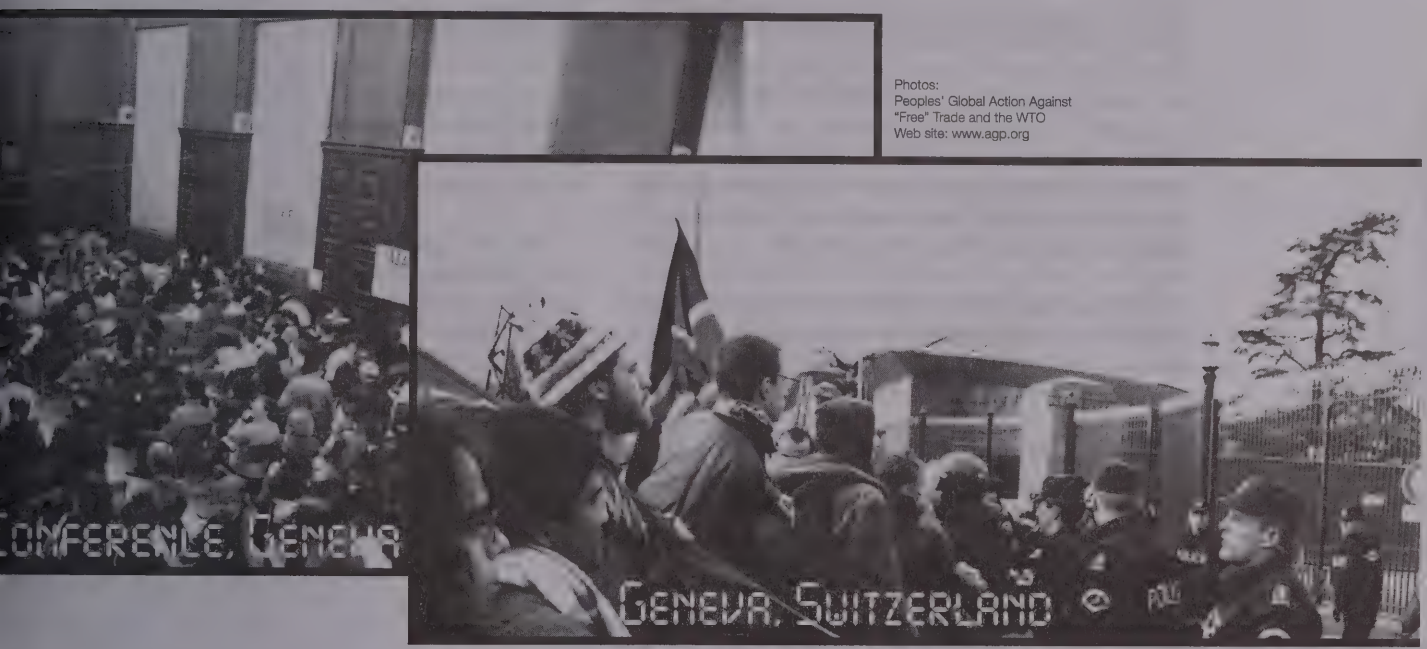
The large corporations lobbied the Northern governments to break down these defences so that they and their products and services could move at will into and out of developing countries.

Those governments made use of all instruments they had or that they could fashion. Domestic instruments (such as conditions in bilateral aid and, in the case of the United States, the dreaded Super 301 unilateral trade retaliation weapon) were used to expand markets for their companies.

Other developing countries have also been drawn into the "liberalisation-globalisation" web through the rules of the WTO, which was set up following the Uruguay Round that expanded the powers of the old GATT.

Through new agreements, the WTO is opening up the agriculture and services sectors of the developing world (in addition to the industrial sector in the previous rules). This will have a profound and negative impact on the small and medium-sized farms and firms in developing countries, most of which (having lost their defence mechanisms) will be unable to withstand the competition from transnationals.

In addition, the WTO will also discipline third-world countries to introduce high-standard intellectual property laws that disallow their people from de-



Photos:
Peoples' Global Action Against
"Free" Trade and the WTO
Web site: www.agp.org

More devastatingly, international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and later the World Trade Organisation (WTO) were used to change the nature and structure of third-world economies, reducing their self-reliance and opening their territories for foreign products, foreign firms and banks.

Third-world countries that had got trapped in debt had to submit, through the IMF-World Bank structural adjustment programmes, in order to stay just a little above the default level (at optimal level from the viewpoint of those who want to continue to exert "leverage" over these countries).

veloping technologies in use in the rich countries. Thus the WTO will be enforcing a system of protectionism for the transnational corporation (TNC) owners of technology, which is counter to its supposed creed of "free trade." These laws will also allow transnational companies to patent life, including genetic materials, crops and animals that are genetically engineered. This will facilitate "biopiracy," by which the age-old knowledge of Southern communities in using biological resources is patented by transnationals of the North to boost the sales and monopolistic high prices of their biotech products.

Moreover, the TNCs have also pressed their governments to introduce a multilateral agreement on investment (MAI) at both the Organisation for

Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the WTO, that would allow foreign investors the right to enter and operate in any treaty country with minimal regulations, and be treated as well or better than local investors. Many developing countries have voiced their opposition, but it is uncertain how strong their resistance can be.

Meanwhile, the influence and authority of the United Nations and its agencies have been eroding, as the G7 countries led a process to transfer their social and economic policy functions to the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO. The declarations of heads of state at the many UN world conferences (on environment, social development, women, habitat) have many idealistic aims and positive practical proposals, but remain rather lifeless for lack of implementation. The attempt to establish a Code of Conduct, to set out the obligations as well as rights of TNCs vis-a-vis states, has been abolished; in its place is the push for the multi-lateral agreement on investment with only rights without obligations for TNCs. The greed of those controlling the large corporations, the intense competition between them, and their obsession for profits, are driving the Northern governments and the international organisations to place the opening of third-world markets (for goods, services, investments and financial operations) at the top of the global agenda.

The people's right to development, to self-determination, to fulfil their basic human needs, to a sustainable environment, are relegated to secondary or even irrelevant status.

However, the situation is not all grim. There is a growing backlash against the globalisation-liberalisation process, not only in the South but also among people in the North, many of whom are themselves victims rather than beneficiaries.

There are strong national groups of citizens, either existing or emerging, that are combatting the social effects of the market (which today is a monopoly-controlled rather than a genuinely free market of many small producers and traders). They are also fighting to protect the rights of communities to control their own land and resources, campaigning against the patenting of life, and are rallying against the MAI and the undemocratic processes and negative effects of the WTO.

Some of these groups have formed networks at national, regional and international levels to increase their outreach and influence.

One of their key objectives is to make the corporations, the banks, funds and financial operators, the G7 and the OECD, the IMF, World Bank and the WTO more accountable to people, communities and the vast majority of states that now have little say in their policies and processes.

Dozens of groups in the North have worked with groups in the South to pressure the World Bank and IMF to be more transparent and more socially responsible in their policies and projects. The Jubilee Campaign is making big waves in its push to cancel the debts of poor countries. Many citizen groups have joined campaigns against patenting of life forms and against genetic engineering of crops. A global network of groups opposing the MAI have made considerable impact in making their views heard, even though they may not be able to stop the process. Thousands of groups across the earth are promoting environmentally sound and socially just ways of production, consumption and living.

These efforts by ordinary people, their communities and organisations are the building blocks of a different world where markets and technology are to be used to serve humanity, and not the other way round, and where the interests of community and the satisfaction of human needs (instead of materialistic greed and the drive for individual or corporate power) are the driving forces and the sources of fulfilment.

In this context, the World Council of Churches, and individual churches, congregations and communities, have a vital role to play in contributing to the struggle of the next century for a more peaceful, just and sustainable world.

Martin Khor is the director of the Third World Network. He can be contacted at 228 Macalister Road, Penang, Malaysia, or fax 604- 2264505 or E-mail: twn@igc.apc.org

CONFRONTING GLOBAL POWERS

A LETTER OF CONCERN AND HOPE

Photo: © Peter Williams - WCC

Dear ecumenical friends,

This letter comes to you from lay-persons and theologians, economic and social experts, ecumenical leaders in Germany and Western Europe, all deeply involved in the ecumenical movement, who organised and met in a seminar to reflect on financial and economic globalisation, in mid-December 1997. The letter is an attempt to share our deliberations with friends and colleagues in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches who are en route to the Assembly at Harare. Convinced that the complexities of globalisation pose a crucial challenge to the ecumenical movement in the next decade, we are routing this letter to others concerned in various regional contexts and to those preparing for the WCC Assembly, in the hope that it will contribute towards the evolution of a common strategy for a long-term ecumenical response to globalisation.

Our aim was to identify more clearly an ecumenical response — both in prophetic message and necessary action — to the consequences of globalisation, analysing the causes thereof in the context of ongoing international financial and economic developments.

Throughout our deliberations, we noted that the term and concept of "globalisation" is applied to a variety of phenomena such as expanding global communications dominated by industrialised nations and the hegemonic invasion of local indigenous cultures by Western civilisation ("McDonaldisation"). In that sense, globalisation is a multi-layered process, the long historic evolution of which can be traced back to the eras of modern exploration and western colonialism. Today, the

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complex process is based upon a neoliberal, economic ideology and replete with ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions: a process which can neither be lauded nor demonised in its entirety. Indeed the ecumenical movement itself is a global one and has its biblical roots — inspite of frequent distortions — in a universalist understanding of God, humankind and nature. "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world (Oikoumene in Greek, orbis in Latin), and all who dwell in it".(Psalm 24:1)

However, and since the multifariousness of globalisation could easily lead to a collusion of concerns, we concentrated on the financial-economic matrix of the process, which is not only its motor but also dominates and determines its development. The dominance of the financial and economic profit growth is called "globalism" in German, indicating that we are dealing with an ideology. It throws up the question: what is good for whom in the global market? Being part of social movements, we understandably focussed our attention on the social and political consequences on the large sections of society and more than two-thirds of the world population who are excluded by the process. Nevertheless, we as bourgeois persons writing this letter, are also aware of ourselves reaping the benefits of globalisation.

THE NEWNESS OF THE GLOBALISATION PROCESS

The emergence of the term "globalisation" over less than ten years is related to the explosive increase in international capital flow: turnovers of up to 1,500 billion US$ of the foreign exchange markets circulate around the world every 24 hours, whereby bank reserves amount in total to about 650 billion US$. Furthermore, only 2-3% of that vast floating capital, we learned, is linked to transactions in the real economy (such as production, services and foreign direct investment). Global finance markets are largely dominated by speculative money, leading to the coinage of the term "casino finance".

The worldwide flow of capital follows its own operating methods and creates its own laws which not only transcend but also overrule national legislations. In fact the pressure of the global institutions (International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the lesser known Bank of International Settlements (BIS) in Basel) which are dominated by the G8 countries, leads to increasing deregulation, that is, the abrogation of legal and social controls on financial and economic activities by nation states. The purpose is to accelerate transactions without hindrance and permit phenomenal gains. In Germany, for example, company profits rose by 46%, and wages by 5% during the last four years (Source: IG Metall Union , May 1998).

An unprecedented interaction between new modes of communication, money markets and rapid technological developments have concentrated decision-making in the hands of a small international elite of financiers, top bankers and leading industrialists. They are still predominantly male, highly trained and influenced by North American and West European universities, and with a hierarchical and patriarchical esprit de corps. They make key decisions from the top, not under democratic control, but in accordance with prevailing neoliberal financial and economic criteria. International financial institutions — notably the International Monetary Fund

and the World Bank — exercise their mandate by the same rules and criteria, in spite of the fact that they are responsible to national governments. The United States plays the role of hegemonic leader, imposing its own interests, supported by other industrialised countries.

The influence of finance and economy on people's lives has reached a new peak, particularly visible in crises like the recent ones in Southeast and East Asia: The economy of an entire nation can almost collapse overnight. Possibilities of employment in certain sectors diminish drastically and are only partially replaced by low-wage "hire and fire jobs" without social security. Social security systems, where these exist, are being eroded. Above all, financial-economic globalisation leads to large-scale exclusion of entire groups of people and populations: globalisation produces extreme wealth for some and increasing poverty for a far larger number.

The threat of exclusion as well as the anonymity of power structures and the speed of decision-making create resignation and fear. These phenomena, together with the claim to an all-prevailing dominance of finance and economy, are accompanied by a quasi-religious legitimisation of globalisation. The use of religious language and symbols to sell products has dramatically increased. Neo-liberalism in its global claim has become an ideology which professes to be the God-given order and the only answer to world problems.

THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS

In keeping with the insights we gained, the most serious aspect of globalisation, at present, is the absence of political and social correctives.

National political institutions have, to a large extent, lost control over global financial and economic processes. At the Davos World Economic Forum in February 1996, the president of the German Federal Bank declared that governments and politicians would, in future, find themselves under the control of market financiers. The eminent economist, John Maynard Keynes, had already warned in the 1930s that "when finance dominates, the development of a country becomes the by-product of the activities of a casino". When global financial and economic decisions are taken without an international political framework and in accordance with the multinational interests of private and corporate players, national governments have little chance of functioning in the interest of their people. Their not entirely involuntary disempowerment is a process that began in the 1980s. In industrialised countries and to a greater extent in the developing South, national interests are overruled by international financial institutions.

The OECD — comprising twenty-nine industrialised states — has, during the past three years, been working secretly on a "Multilateral Agreement on Investment"(MAI). The aim of this agreement would be to extend the programme of deregulation in a systematic way. Transnational corporations (TNCs) and other investors would be accorded unlimited rights in recipient countries, which in turn would have to assume obligations. This would secure the universal predominance of capital interests at the expense of human needs and human rights, while overruling democratic and participatory structures in society. The process of adopting this agreement has been halted at present, but its demands are likely to reappear. What we need is a true "MAI", with unconditional observation of existing social security systems and environmental standards and one which should also be required to reinvest as much of the profits as possible in the respective countries.

In the West, there is a deterioration of employment opportunities and social security at the national level because of the absence of political decision-making power and public funding. Very often power is not enforced and tax evasion leads to lack of public funding. The logical consequence is: the poor foot the bill. This continues to increasingly alienate people from democratic norms. Abstention from elections has become a common phenomenon in industrialised nations. It is coupled with widespread tax evasion by those who benefit from economic globalisation, all of which seriously weakens the nation-state.

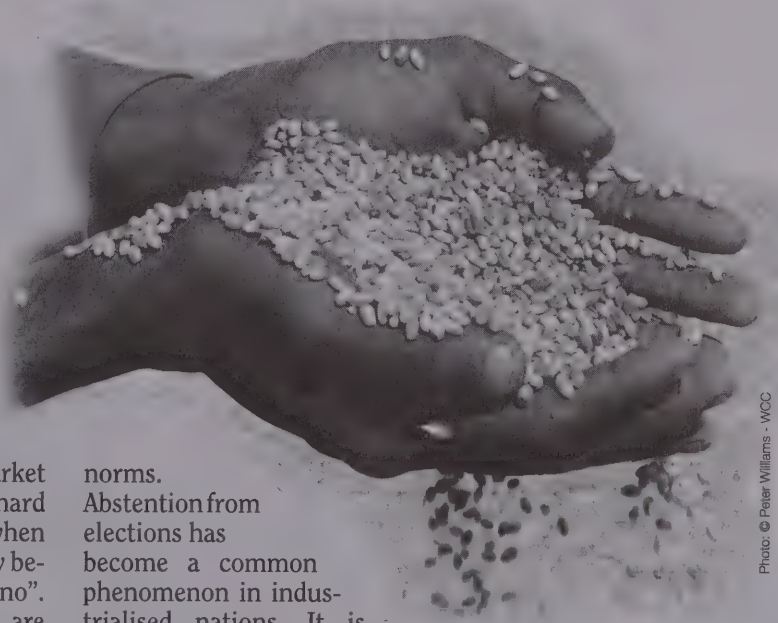


Photo: © Peter Williams - WCC

In the present crisis, established churches have yet to convincingly fulfill their public responsibilities. While they decry the ambiguities of globalisa-

Photo: © Michael Dominguez - WCC

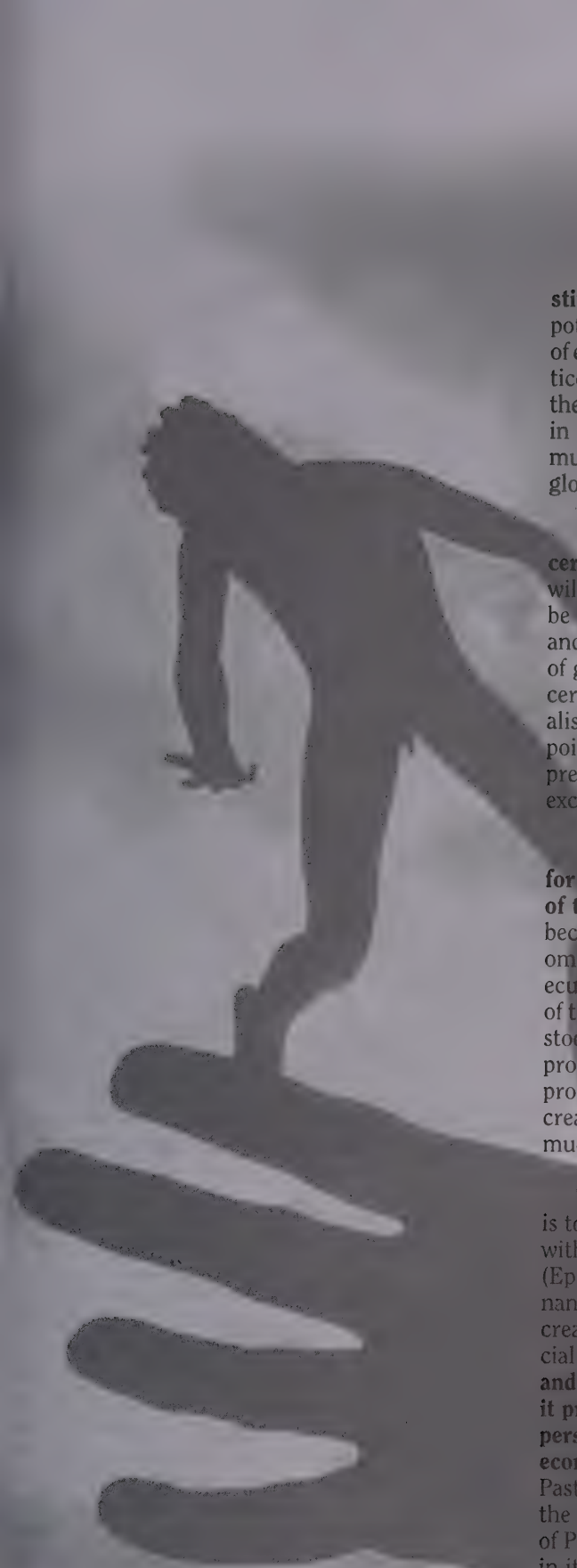
tion
and insist on
social and ecological criteria for economy, they do not consistently work for their implementation.
One example is the recent "Joint Word of the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches in Germany" on social and economic issues ("Towards a Future in Solidarity and Justice"). It critisises globalisation's neoliberal trends, but proposes concrete steps for change only half-heartedly. At the same time, German churches are experiencing a serious drop in their income levels, often without attributing this to those trends. We hope that the self-centered lament paralysing our churches can be overcome by a spiritual response based on the biblical understanding of Shalom — peace, wholeness, life in balance.

BIBLICAL AND ECUMENICAL ORIENTATIONS

The World Council of Churches, formed in 1948, has seen itself as a **movement and a community of sharing, of solidarity with the poor and marginalised, and of "Hope in Action"**. Accordingly, the strength of the ecumenical movement has been to contribute to the analysis of global political and economic processes as well as to evaluate regional experiences, by organising programmes, particularly in the field of development, human rights, health care and education. The search for social justice and the issue of just stewardship have been the focus of ecumenical social ethics. That has led also to alliances with movements and groups with the same orientation and similar goals. At the same time, many initiatives and alliances have arisen as a counter-movement to the ruling world economic order and to the uncontrolled activities of transnational corporations, which lead to the economic and social marginalisation and exclusion of the majority of people in many countries. Today it is our task in the ecumenical movement to coordinate and intensify our activities as a counter-force to prevailing unjust developments.

Since 1948, the World Council of Churches has spoken clearly in favour of a "responsible world society" and the unity of humankind. It has shared with the United Nations the vision of a just and peaceful world order, and supported the **"elaboration of norms and standards governing international behaviour for the benefit of the whole of humankind and the global environment"** (WCC Central Committee Geneva 1995). However, we know that not only denominationalism and confessionalism, but also the lack of respect for people of other thoughts and faiths, have contributed to the very domination and marginalisation of which we today accuse the financial-economic project of globalisation shaped by neoliberalism. We hope, therefore, that churches will take a critical look at their own history which has hitherto hindered their vision of a just and peaceful world order.

The New Testament concept of "oikoumene" reflects the experience of the early Christian congregations in confrontation with the globalised claim to power of the Roman empire in Hellenistic times: on the one hand, Christian congregations of poor people, slaves and strangers, and on the other, the power structures of globalisation as imposed by the emperor. **The conciliar community of the early church con-**



stituted a kind of counter-power that lost its critical potential because of its ties to the state, since the time of emperor Constantine. The conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, along with the idea of a church in solidarity with the poor, have in our day renewed the vision of a church as a community for justice and a counter-measure to forced globalisation.

In his parables, Jesus encouraged people **to discern the "signs of the time"** and to conform to the will of God. He taught us that the Spirit must always be discerned anew, in relation to the actual situation and the specific context. The "black and white" vision of good and evil is of no use when the power of discernment is required to cope with the fall-outs of globalisation. But even in Jesus' tradition, the reference point remains his priority option for the poor, the oppressed and the weak. He places the marginal and the excluded at the centre of his concern and care.

The church of Jesus Christ is called **to speak up for those who have no advocates and to be the voice of the voiceless**: those whose right to live is reduced because they are denied participation in the economic life of their society. With this mandate, the ecumenical movement continues the biblical message of the prophets of the Jewish-Christian tradition who stood by victims and those in difficulties. To them, the promised Messiah will bring equity and justice. The prophets tell us that justice is the centre and injustice creates the margins. "Who has little in life shall have much in law"(Helmut Simon).

Therefore the priority of ecumenical social ethics is to contribute along with others and in accordance with God's economy to unite all people and things (Ephesians 1:9-10) and to challenge the globalised financial economy, so that life is not dominated by increasing deregulation caused by international financial and capital markets. **"Every economic decision and institution must be judged in the light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person... All people have a right to participate in the economic life of society"** (*Economic justice for all.* Pastoral letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference in the USA, 1986, par. 13, 15). That means, in the sense of Psalm 24: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it". Since Yahweh is the lord of every country and of all resources, they shall not belong to one king or a few people alone, but shall be for the benefit of all people and creatures. Where this instruction is violated, where power and property are accumulated in the hands of a few, Shalom as a social, political and religious order is seen to break down. This is also true ecologically: where the delusion of feasibility and the orientation on profits dominate, nature is polluted, life is ignored and the vision of a "just, participatory and sustainable society" is consciously denied.

Photo: © WCC

SIGNS OF HOPE AND MODELS FOR THE FUTURE

In spite of globalisation, **alternative modes of production and trade** — which undercut the system — are being organised at local and regional levels (so-called shadow economies, alternative local exchange systems, direct marketing, etc.). Large-scale unemployment gives rise to new viable approaches to work on a basis of reciprocal exchange of labour, mutual neighbourly assistance and job-sharing. Very often these are merely efforts to ensure survival or expressions of resistance, which do not, in reality, correct the unjust distribution of wealth.

New social movements today are increasingly seeking to form a counter-culture against imposed, neoliberal, financial-economic globalisation. The global impact on local and regional contexts forces them to a wider analysis, communication and linkage with other groups, as well as to a differentiated awareness of social, economic and political processes. Their objection is against the concentration of power and exclusion. They are aware of the dignity of local cultures and traditions which challenge global dynamics. Thus they draw strength from local cultures while resisting the dangers of provincialism and the creation of isolated "sanctuaries".

The self-organisation of people in social movements is mushrooming. For example, we learned that the WCC has assembled information on around a thousand movements of this kind in all continents. Together with the fast-growing number of tens of thousands of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), they are emerging as a counterforce to those who control and dictate the process of globalisation. Information technology enables grassroots and people's networks to communicate faster and more easily with each other. This facilitates more active joint action and is, as such, an example of what could be called "globalisation from below". In spite of varying interests, NGOs need to work together for a pluralistic civil society based on common principles like the non-violent resolution of conflicts, participation and democratisation, basic social as well as human and political rights for all, security for minorities and the preservation of nature. **Financial and economic globalisation calls for strategically different forms of intervention** that should, however, be interlinked:

- **grassroots solidarity groups** constitute fragile temporary forms of joint action, but they may, at the local or regional level, respond creatively to, for instance, initiatives of the jobless, asylum groups, projects for the homeless, ombudsmen, trade union groups, etc.

- **alternative communities**, many with an ecological approach and a new lifestyle or, alternately, with the older vision of a communitarian life, are vigorously engaged in local work for peace and justice.

- **non-governmental organisations** (NGOs) have gathered special expert knowledge on financial and economic alternatives, human rights, asylum, social and health issues. Their task is to lobby with political institutions. However, they are dependent on generous sponsoring and need support groups.
- **comprehensive social movements**, which are problem-oriented in their work, operate on a regional and global level. They network among themselves and seek to give a structural and institutionalised expression of the "option for the poor" and the siding with marginalised people. They are a public counter-movement, especially vis-à-vis governments (see their role in Copenhagen Social Summit, 1995).

- **trade unions**, currently experiencing a decline both in terms of membership and influence, are placed in an ambivalent role. On the one hand, they are a lobby for the employed, on the other, their bargaining power in the so-called social partnership at the national level in Europe and elsewhere has been outmanouvered by economic globalisation, which has resulted in diminishing significance of national agreements. In the new world order, workers from various countries — particularly those employed in multinational corporations — as well as the unemployed, are in competition with each other. The trade unions have yet to find ways to overcome these contradictions. At present, adjustments are taking place in workers' organisations: one can observe negotiating initiatives at the outlet level, a merger of trade unions into more representative units and the first signs of international cooperation. New networks are emerging to voice the political demands of the unemployed and underemployed, like those in France.

The **women's movements** in various places are good examples of alternative social movements today. They have raised most vigorously the question of the credibility of male-dominated political structures. They have revealed the political power stuggle between men and women, and have opted for a dynamic power link between the daily life of people and political decision-makers. **They are working for goals which concern everybody and will particularly benefit the marginalised:** abolition of direct and indirect discrimination in education, wages, job applications and career opportunities, guaranteed basic salary, public child care, social security in relation to domestic and family chores.

Some base movements, particularly in the South, also invigorate **traditional Indigenous cultures** and challenge their age-old traditional structures. In helping to overcome inherited forms of social oppression and in developing ethno-religious identity, these movements strengthen and regenerate local cultures as alternatives to the pressures of "McDonaldisation". The cultural and social revolution initiated by globalisation may well work both ways and ultimately bring about a "glocal"(combined local and global) culture. Religious movements contribute ethical criteria and value systems on the basis of their traditions, but increasingly also on an interfaith basis and in interreligious cooperation, against the inhuman consequences of globalisation. However, it was noted that institutionalised religious communities, such as our own churches, are often

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unable to convey a message of any real relevance for this process.

In this connection we need a new **spirituality in combat** that helps overcome fear and powerlessness and follows Jesus up to the point where confrontation becomes unavoidable. It is true that an initiative or a perspective alone does not make a breakthrough or create a strategic alliance to counter the power of globalised capital. Here, churches have the special task of shedding middle-class orientation and truly engaging in people's lives and problems by standing by the people, drawing them away from isolation and individualism, and inviting them into the practice of community in solidarity, where spiritual emphasis and prophetic awakening grow together, and where local, regional and worldwide interaction is sought.

What we hope is emerging, is a civil society in which we take responsibility with and for each other to address fearlessly and intelligently the challenges of the all-powerful and unjust process of financial and economic globalisation. This is demonstrated by the growing number of base groups and initiatives and the growing national and international networks attempting to form a global civil society. At the same time, this is still a learning process. For instance, non-violent resolution of conflicts is yet to be successfully worked out. In civil society, no one person stands for the truth. Truth begins with two persons, and it is, at best, intersubjective. Thus civil society is a counter-model to any kind of totalitarian ideology. Those who work for civil society accept the right of minorities positively within the framework of human and civil rights, and promote intercultural dialogue. They support participation, especially of those who have little or no voice in the prevailing reality of structural domination and power relations.

Within the framework of economic changes, many groups give special attention to the analysis of **alternative economies**. This requires an openness to share and enter into new alliances between businesses and basic movements, and to be publicly active in favour of just taxation of income and property:

- ***willingness to share*** - especially the willingness of citizens in the North and their labour unions to choose a means to increase income and consumption substantially different from the one seemingly dictated by the maximum possible increase of higher productivity. Furthermore "a space of solidarity" should arise in the form of savings and investments which are not used merely

for ever-higher productivity, but instead for human, social, and ecological outlays for the reconstruction of society, the preservation of life and the maintenance of our global heritage.

- ***willingness to act with prudence*** - this applies, for instance, to corporations, which begin to understand that failure in terms of a loss of public trust may be as deadly as market-failure, and that the prevention of harmful effects may be far less costly than the compensation afterwards. This openness to "pre-care" could enhance the increasing willingness of corporations to enter into contracts with NGOs, national states and/or international agencies in relation to their social and ecological behaviour;

- ***willingness to act for public welfare*** - this applies especially to governments and international institutions, and includes willingness to curb the one-sidedness of the free movement of international capital (and the almost reckless use of nature) on the one hand, and continually high taxes and levies on labour on the other. Even a small Tobin tax* could mark some kind of departure from the presently highly unstable and irresponsible financial situation in which freely floating international capital, driven by the expectation of high financial rewards in the short run, worsens the rat-race between the richest competitive nations, and expropriates from the poorest nations those forms of capital which they most urgently need.

While the neoliberal approach (e.g. Chicago School and associates) is presently the foundation of financial-economic globalisation and the hegemonic system of the current world order, serious corrections and entirely different approaches are being professionally discussed. They deal with the obvious weaknesses of the ruling system: it leaves the costs of prevention and/or reduction of social and environmental damages or burdens outside its accounting system. Economists also told us that other viable economic approaches based, for instance, on "sustainability"(i.e. priority to sustaining the earth and its resources), are in the making and could offer a viable alternative for a better future.

In order **to manage the international financial markets** in an economically and politically responsible manner, we are convinced that there is urgent need to build up an independent international financial supervisory board. It could point out developments and undesirable trends in the markets, implement measures to regulate capital movements through a Tobin Tax*.

There is no dearth of ideas, only of political will. It is interesting to note that the World Economic Forum in Davos — in reaction to the crisis in Southeast and East Asia — this year admitted that there is a need for regulations at the international level to bring about some measure of control of financial and economic markets. It is the task of social movements and non-governmental organisations to chart a new course through public debates and increase pressure on policy.

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While we, at our meeting in Mainz, focused on the role of movements and NGOs, we are quite aware that they need to enter into coalitions with institutions like trade unions and with the global players (see the recent joint initiative of the head of the worldwide Anglican Communion, the Archbishop of Canterbury, with the World Bank President Wolfensohn to form an interreligious working group).

CALL FOR ACTION IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

We, who are part of the ecumenical movement, very urgently require the assistance and leadership of the World Council of Churches in this task. Churches, ecumenical groups and movements around the world cannot adequately oversee, analyse and discern the process of globalisation from their respective contexts alone. Those who are part of one

locality within one global region need to exchange experiences with others. For inter-contextual reflection and action for a truly ecumenical response to globalisation, we need the pooling of resources and action models through team visits and other processes of mutual "interrogation" and accountability. Existing centres of research and reference in this field (e.g. in Germany and the Netherlands) must be interlinked. We regard the globalisation process as the determining context for social diakonia, witness and mission in the ecumenical movement during the next decade. While we are not yet in a position to provide concrete details of an appropriate response, we offer these reflections as a contribution towards a programmatic initiative to be launched at the forthcoming WCC Assembly for study and action with the churches and people of goodwill.

June 30, 1998

Sincerely,

Albertz, Rainer, Münster
Albrecht, Katja, Berlin
Anhelm, Fritz Erich, Loccum
Batista, Israel, Geneva
Dejung, Karl-Heinz, Mainz
Drimmelen, Rob van, Brussels
Duchrow, Ulrich, Heidelberg
Eberle, Martin, Berlin
Frasch, Gerhild, Frankfurt/M.
Gebert, Werner, Tübingen
Gern, Wolfgang, Mainz
Goudzwaard, Bob, Driebergen/Amsterdam
Gück, Martin, Heidelberg
Heidel, Klaus, Heidelberg
Krusche, Günter, Berlin
Linz, Johanna, Hamburg
Löffler, Paul, Lauenburg
Maury, Jacques, Paris
Oxen, Kathrin, Berlin
Peschke, Doris, Frankfurt/M.
Plonz, Sabine, Iserlohn
Potter, Philip, Frankfurt/M
Santa Ana, Julio de, Sao Paulo/Geneva
Springe, Christa, Mainz
Stöhr, Marieluise, Bad Vilbel
Stöhr, Martin, Bad Vilbel
Wartenberg-Potter, Bärbel, Frankfurt/M.
Zumach, Hildegard, Bergisch-Gladbach

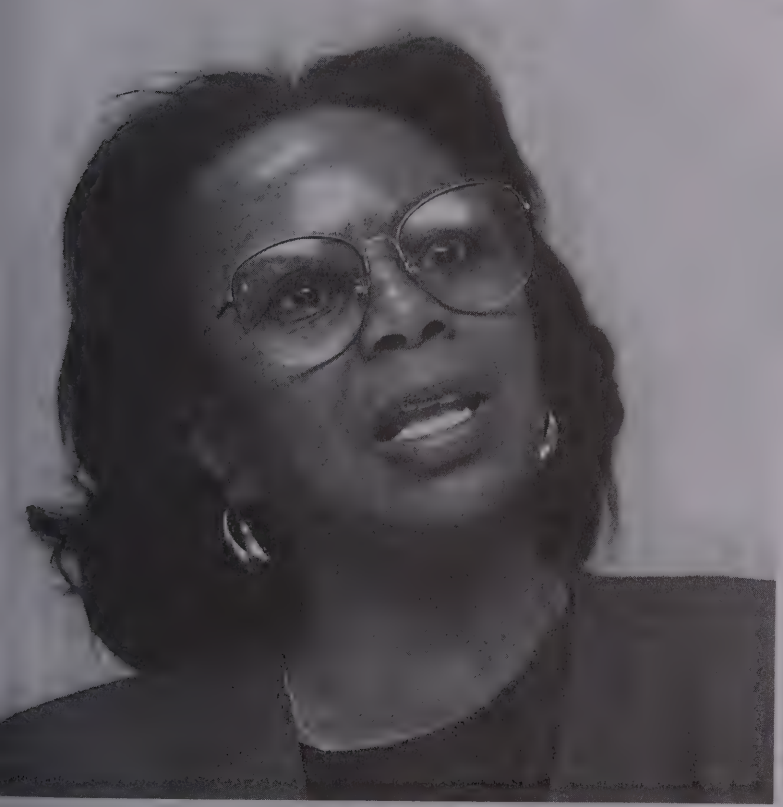
**Tobin tax:*

Following a proposal made by the US American economist James Tobin, the United Nations calculated that a tax on global foreign exchange transactions could raise hundreds of billions of US dollars. The revenues from this tax would facilitate financing various public activities like environmental care, social programmes, development aid and the work of the United Nations itself. The tax would in addition render speculation less attractive, and would contribute towards stabilising international financial markets.

A SAFE SPACE

by Yvonne Delk

Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) Commissioner Yvonne Delk from the USA spoke at the opening session of the *SISTERS North American workshop in Albuquerque, New Mexico, February, 1998. This is an edited version of her original address. The address was particularly for women gathered in that one place in Albuquerque, but it struck us that what she said holds true for the whole ecumenical movement.**



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It's always a special time when, in the midst of our schedules, our commitments, our joys and our hopes, our pain and our struggle, we can find the time to connect with each other as women who bear the triple burden of racism, sexism and classism, and are able to open up to each other, to speak boldly to each other, to share from the deepest places of our hearts.

However, if this is to happen, we need to have a safe space in which to be and to feel safe, sacred and honoured.

Permit me to be your spirit guide into this space. Each of us, in our own way, suffers from the syndrome of "super-woman". Each of us comes to this meeting trying to bear all things, believe all things and solve all things. Each of us is trying to keep too many balls in the air. Each of us is trying to measure up to the expectations and demands that come from our external world and trying to live up to the high standards that we set for ourselves. Each of us is living with the rage of living in a racist, sexist, and classist church and society.

Each of us in our ways are sisters that are driven, passionate, souls on fire for justice. Each of us in our ways are trail-blazers and mentors for many others. Each of us in our own ways have claimed for ourselves the task of being the voice — the voice of the poor, and those struggling for justice, the voice crying out for racial justice. If we are honest with each other, each of us comes to this place as wounded healers. Each of us struggles with how to live in damaged bodies in a world where pain is meant to be gagged, uncured, ungrieved over.

Let me guide you into that safe space where we can name our pain. The issue that I struggle with in a body that is aging and slower and more painful is how to connect the pain and wounds of my body to the pain of my sisters around the globe. The issue that I struggle with is how to find that rhythm between taking care of myself and trying to minister to an institution, and to speak on behalf of people who have no voice and to stand with people or to sit with people who need to be sat with.

We must find a way to make of this space a safe place where we can hear each other into speech, where we will not withdraw when we disagree, where we will lift up our differences openly and publicly, and where we can trust one another to reveal the vulnerable and wounded places of our lives and our journey.

Permit me to guide you to the safe and sacred space which has been hallowed by those who have gone before us. We are not in this place alone — but we are in a circle. It is a circle of women who in all times and in all ages have been carving out a path of hope, dignity, justice, rights, equality. I see their faces and I feel their spirits, and I am energised by their commitments. I see and feel them, but only some of them. Each of us here brings with us names of the ancestors, the sisters that have touched us and nurtured us and helped us to be more than we thought we could be.

They are — in the words of Alice Walker — our spiritual guides. Alice Walker describes a spirit guide as those persons in history who help us and guide us along the way. They create opportunities that make a meeting with and recognition of them unavoidable. We walk with the cloak of their authority. Their smiles continue in our smile; their great irresistible hearts rise within our hearts. Every experience that has roused their passion against injustice beats in our hearts, empowering us to stand with courage and conviction. We must find a way to remember them as a sacred part of what makes this a sacred and safe place.

As we continue our journey, let me lead you to the safe and sacred space that makes it possible for us to honour the stories. We are sisters of faith and struggle who have journeyed from generation to generation, in catacombs and cathedrals, in fields and in churches, around kitchen

tables and communion tables, political tables, activist tables, community tables, in special times and special places. We are sisters who bring our particular stories of how we and our ancestors have been on a journey from centuries of conquest, genocide and slavery to conversion, repentance, and new history. It is here that you will tell your story in your own way — your pain, your joys, your passion, your power, your force.

The journey now calls us to the safe and sacred space where we can receive each other as sisters. The acronym *SISTERS* means Sisters in the Struggle to Eliminate Racism and Sexism. This is the space where we understand the connections that are between us. It is the space where I recognise that I am because you are and because you are, I can be also. It is the space where we connect to each other in solidarity and hospitality. It is the place where I connect with your story because it connects with my story. It is the place where I connect with your struggle to be against the odds, because it connects with my struggle to be. It is the place where I hear your pain, because it connects to my pain. It is the place where I celebrate your victory in taking on racism, sexism, and classism because your victory becomes permission and authorisation for me to keep on fighting, struggling, hoping and believing.

Sisters are there for each other. Oh, we may disagree and challenge each other, but we are there for each other. Sisters engage in binding, covenant relationships, not just for the short space of a weekend, but for the long haul of our existence. Sisters do not give up on one another; rather, we are willing to make promises and keep them. We don't walk away when the going gets rough.

However, words are not enough to make this space safe and sacred. It requires more. It requires concrete expressions that become signs and symbols of the reality that we are ready to step out in faith, even though the path has not fully appeared. Let us therefore reach in, take a deep breath, centre ourselves in the reality that the Holy Spirit is at work, renewing, empowering, revealing and connecting. Let us release our fears, our anxieties, our mistrust.

Let us reach out to embrace the spirit that is in the sisters in this place. The spirit that is working to make all things new. Let us really look at each other, and see the beauty of the creation and the diversity that is revealed in the one who now sits beside you, or across from you, or in front of you. Let us open ourselves to receive life from our ancestors and the sisters. A thread is moving. Let us each receive it and pass it on as a symbol of the life-giving, life-sharing, power that is in us. In the circle and in the threads that connect us. As we receive the thread and pass it on, we honour and declare this a sacred and safe space.

The ancestors are here and they are surrounding us with their spirits and their journey. Let us name the ancestors on whose shoulders we stand and who made it possible for us to be here. As we name the ancestors, we declare this a sacred and safe space.

We have travelled through the pain and hope of our existence. We have come through storms, strong winds and the warmth of the sun. It has not been easy, but we have survived.

The spirit is in this place. It is in each of us and each of us has a blessing that we can offer the other. Let us be open to giving and receiving, hoping and believing, trusting and reaching. As we bless each other in the midst of this journey, envision your sister as a companion on the way rather than a competitor who is getting in your way. We are now in the sacred circle of life where we can:

- speak freely and boldly;
- trust;
- become vulnerable one to the other;
- share our pain and our hope;
- honour each other;
- connect to each other in solidarity and hospitality;
- open ourselves to each other;
- touch and be touched;
- bless and be blessed;
- name our demons;
- know our power;
- fight our victimisation;
- find our voice;
- build solidarity with one another;
- and know that through it all God is with us.

She has blessed and hallowed the place where we now move and have our being — making it a safe space.

**SISTERS: Sisters in the Struggle to Eliminate Racism and Sexism*

Echoes asked a number of people from within the WCC Central Committee and Unit III Commission membership to share their hopes for the Assembly with specific reference to what they see as a major issue.

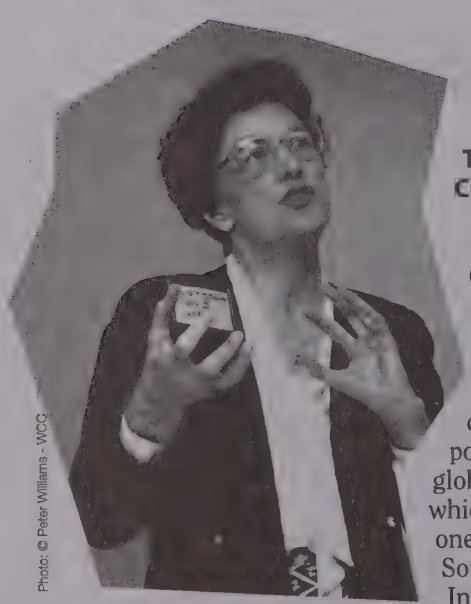


Photo: © Peter Williams - WCC

THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS

From my context as a Christian in the USA, I struggle with the terrible reality that one billion three hundred million men, women and children in the world live in poverty, impacted by the global economic system which is accountable to no one. The recent crises in South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia, the earlier crisis in Mexico and near disasters in other nations show the vulnerability of this global system, but the suffering and injustice inflicted on the poor remains largely invisible. The remedies suggested by national and international leaders call for more of the failed policies of the past.

The Assembly of the World Council of Churches needs to reflect on this global crisis from a theological perspective, seek a clearer understanding of the issues involved, work toward finding a new vision of the future, agree to take some concerted action now on issues like debt relief, and commit the churches to give priority attention to working together for a just and human global economic system. The well-being of the oikoumene, the whole inhabited earth, is at stake. This complex crisis is both an ecclesial and an ethical challenge to the churches. We dare not expend all our energy on internal conflicts, important as those may be, and give scant energy to the reality of the millions of children of God who suffer and even die each day, caught in the vise of the global economic system.

Belle Miller McMaster
USA

Photo: © Peter Williams - WCC

At the present time, one of the major problems in our part of the world — Latin America and the Caribbean — is that of exclusion. More and more people are being excluded from participation in society as they become poorer due to the programmes of structural adjustments imposed by the IMF and the World Bank, related to the unpayable external debt and the policies of globalisation and neo-liberalism. Intolerance for different views, behaviour, theology, sexual orientation, race and/or appearance permeates many societies. People are prevented from crossing the borders that separate nations. Many are being deported. Entire nations are excluded from decision-making processes and self-determination, such as Puerto Rico. Cuba suffers a blockade. The entire Caribbean region seems to have been left out of the plans of the powerful who control international policies and participation. Latin America is also affected.

In keeping with our ecumenical vocation, the Assembly should deal with the reality of exclusion and its consequences — at the socio-economic, political and ecclesial levels — reaffirming the commitment of the churches and the Council to the promotion and creation of structures, policies and programmes and communities that are inclusive at all levels.

Eunice Santana
Puerto Rico

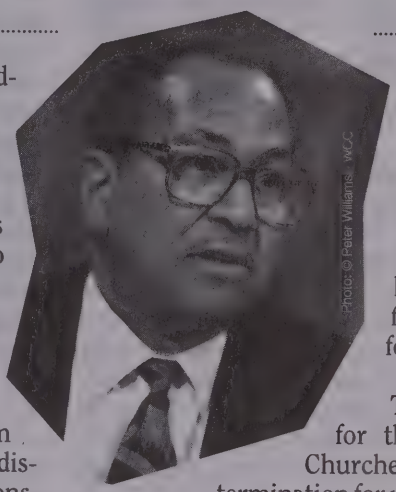


Photo: © Peter Williams - WCC

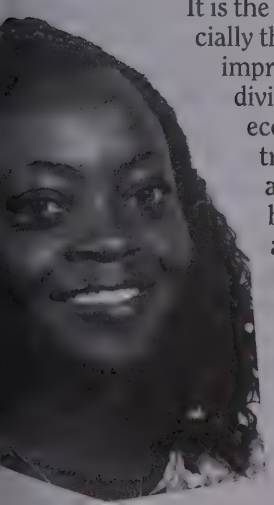
Recently I attempted to enumerate world-changing circumstances and attitudes which have strongly impacted the 20th century. My list is arranged in couplets with no claim to accuracy and, unfortunately, it portrays a picture far more dismal than intended. While by no means exhaustive, because I keep adding categories, to me it describes in part the landscape of our human pilgrimage. The list includes war and arms races, nuclear power and the new technology, racism and international poverty, environmental deficiencies and economic excessiveness, violence and rebellion or rage, terrorism and refugees, cold war and moral disarmament, dissolution of imperial powers and developing nations, rampant individualism and family/community disintegration, anti-Christianity and anti-denominationalism.

Since I am an optimist, I would have preferred a different formulation of couplets, for example, war and peace, nuclear power and human dignity. The reality however, does not seem to paint that portrait, but rather leaves us to answer whether or not we have learned from our mistakes and gained knowledge from our efforts to make life better for humankind.

The profounder issue for the World Council of Churches is to match our determination for unity and inclusiveness with our pronouncements that we are a community of churches. When we are one, as Jesus has prescribed, the "world will believe".

Vinton R. Anderson
USA

THE IMPACT OF THE IMF AND WORLD BANK POLICIES ON DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



It is the desire of all countries, especially the poor ones, to develop and improve the livelihood of the individuals in their respective economies. Developing countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia are no exception, but the capital needed to achieve a sustainable level of development is enormous and beyond the means of the respective governments.

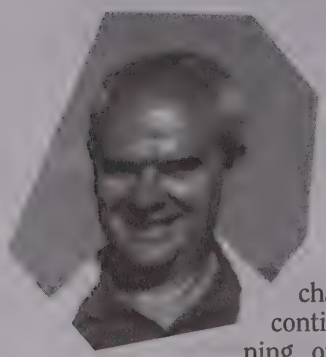
Several attempts being made to raise the needed capital through international trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) have not yielded enough, and governments are compelled to seek funding from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Funds provided by such organisations normally come with a package of economic reforms which are expected to act as a "panacea" to the financial problems of these debt-ridden economies.

In their attempt to implement the packages that come in the form of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and economic recovery programmes (ERPs), our governments have inflicted untold hardship on their peoples. Subsidies for health, agriculture and education are reduced, and

down-sizing and privatisation takes place in many government departments and organisations. The negative impact of these measures on the lives of people are well known.

Churches must not turn a blind eye to the impact of these policies on their members who may find solace in religion — for how long? Churches must engage their governments in meaningful discussions and offer viable alternatives. In this respect, churches should set up data banks of resource personnel who can be relied upon to spearhead the discussions with their respective governments.

MrsBeatrice Odonkor
Ghana



The impact on our Latin American context and reality of economic globalisation, and its immediate influence on our cultures, traditions and natural environment — the good Creation of God — and the resulting climate change constitutes a serious challenge we already and will continue to confront at the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity.

Poverty, the struggle of the landless and the homeless, unemployment, underemployment, hopelessness, social marginalisation, climate change, endless consumerism: these are all consequences of a globalisation based on the so-called free market, whose dominant goal seems to be obtaining ever-growing profits, weakening the Christian spirit of love, modesty and solidarity. Our main crisis is our spiritual crisis. We are not fulfilling what our Saviour has taught us: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved, you should love one another" (John 13:34).

Impacta sobre nuestro contexto y realidad Latinoamericanos la globalización económica y su inmediata influencia sobre nuestras culturas, tradiciones, medio ambiente natural — la muy buena Creación de Dios — y el consecuente cambio climático, constituyéndose en un serio desafío que ya enfrentamos y enfrentaremos en los comienzos del tercer milenio de la Cristiandad.

La pobreza; la lucha de los sin tierra y sin hogar; el desempleo, el subempleo, la desesperanza; la marginación social; el cambio climático; el consumismo sin fin: son consecuencias de una globalización basada en el denominado libre mercado cuyo fin dominante pareciera ser la obtención de cada vez mayores ganancias, debilitando el espíritu Cristiano de amor, modestia, y solidaridad. Nuestra mayor crisis es nuestra crisis espiritual. No estamos cumpliendo lo que nuestro Salvador nos ha enseñado: "Un nuevo mandamiento os doy: que os améis unos a otros; que como yo os he amado, así también os améis unos a ostros" (Juan 13.34).

Elias Crisostomo Abramides,
Argentina

As a young female representative of the Anglican Church in the Caribbean & West Indies, I would like the Assembly to discuss and act on the issues of international debt and how this is linked to globalisation. I am particularly concerned about the continued effects of the international debt crisis and globalisation on poor and marginalised communities, especially those in the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America and the many pockets of the South which inhabit the more affluent North. The continuing marginalising effect of globalisation and the increasingly forced trade liberalisation of local economies, which has of necessity become the lot of micro-states in the Caribbean and other areas, continues to be an issue which will dominate our economic, social, religious and political reality in the region for many years into the new millennium. Just how life-threatening and hazardous trade liberalisation can be for small debt-ridden and resource-challenged economies can be seen from the devastating effects which the recent World Trade Organisation (WTO) liberalisation rulings have had on the "banana-producing" countries of the Caribbean. It has effectively wiped out the earning ability of several communities of farmers in the Windward Islands.

The WCC must see its responsibility to continue the call for international debt relief and a study-action plan on how globalisation disproportionately affects

peoples of colour, women, children and young people. Our global Christian and religious community, gathered in Harare, must speak out on the deadly impact which globalisation coupled with the scourge of international debt continues to have on the societies and economies of impoverished developing countries. Our ability to rejoice in hope continues to be circumscribed by these seemingly ever-present realities of exclusion, poverty and economic and social marginalisation.

Donnalie E.C. Edwards,
Antigua

From my context, working with issues of justice, peace and creation within the Christian Council of Sweden, the major issue which I would like the Assembly to discuss and act on is the debt issue. It should be discussed within the context of Jubilee and as part of the broader issue of economic justice.

It would be of enormous value if the Assembly could challenge and encourage the churches to take the issue of economic justice much more seriously than is the case today. The debt issue could serve as a useful entry point to this very much needed discussion.

I sympathise with the decision taken by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to deal with economic injustice in the world as a matter of faith. We must bring these issues into the centre of our Christian faith and the life of our churches.

A clear statement on debt will also mean that the Assembly will address an issue that clearly is on the political agenda right now. It would give considerable support to the Jubilee 2000 campaign. It would also clearly remind the churches that the Jubilee celebration in connection with the new millennium must include at its centre the economic injustice in the world of today.

Lennart Renöfält
Sweden

Bananas, Beggars and the Hope to Go On

Bible Study by Emma Leslie

Matthew 15: 21-28
Mark 7: 24- 30

It was one of those embarrassing moments that everyone wished had not happened. It was the Saturday afternoon youth worship. Everyone was singing one of the more popular choruses. Most of us were so involved in the sound of our own voices we did not notice the scruffy old woman make her way in through the back door. As the last note rang out we all collapsed in our seats ready for the next prayer. We looked up expectantly only to find the worship leader staring towards the back of the room.

One person had not sat down in unison with the rest of us. It was of course the scruffy woman. We all looked around to see what he was looking at. An awkward 26 seconds ticked by. The worship leader looked at some of the other youth leaders imploringly — as if to say "do something". Nobody moved.

The old woman started to babble loudly, almost as if she was ready to join in on the next round of choruses. She then abruptly stopped, realising that everyone was looking at her, and seemed to recall her mission. "Soum, mouy roy", she pleaded, hands pressed together anxiously, yet respectful, humble. She had used the common catch cry of all of Cambodia's beggars —please one hundred riel (about three cents). Someone abruptly got up from their seat and pressed five hundred riel into her hand and shepherded her outside. The worship leader called the next hymn and asked for people to bring forward their offerings for God. The incident was past. No more was said. We went on as if she had never existed.

When I first came to work in Cambodia I loathed going to the market to do my weekly shopping. It wasn't the bargaining that bothered me, or the exposed carcasses or even the sewage which ran through open drains under the market stalls. It was the beggars.

Several friends gave me advice about how to deal with them. "You just have to decide to give to no-one or to everyone, and as it is impossible to give to everyone, better to save your money for someone you can really help." The cold-faced, hard-hearted approach worked for a couple of trips, but it didn't last. The next friend advised only to give to women and children, because men can always find work and male beggars are just lazy. Another friend chipped in, "Yes and never give to amputees because most of them have wooden legs at home — they just take them off to make you feel sorry for them." So it seemed to be the art of distinguishing who was in real need.

The problem was that, in contrast to my privileged life, all of the aforementioned categories seemed pretty desperate — prosthesis or no prosthesis! Further wisdom was proffered, "I always make my first stop the banana shop. There I buy a huge bunch of bananas and anyone who targets me gets a banana. Not everyone is happy of course, but at least I've given them something and the banana lady loves it!" This worked well for a while, but it still didn't fit.

The disciples must have faced the same problem as they tried to dispatch the Syrophoenician woman. Jesus had wanted to be quiet, to rest, to take some time out. But there she was outside, bellowing, begging, pleading for the life of her daughter, asking a perfect stranger for help. All too persistent and irritating for the important work the disciples were doing with Jesus. They wanted to send her away. To end quickly this embarrassing scene. She did not belong there.

Whatever they did, their attempts failed and they were forced to ask Jesus to assist. How ashamed they must have felt to have to disturb their teacher with the presence of a troublesome beggar woman.

What courage it must take to be a beggar. To risk being turned away. To ask for something in return for nothing.

Over time, I began to see that the problem with all of our "begging theories" was that we were not accounting for the fact that these were human beings. The more we treated them like monkeys who could be turned away with a simple banana, the more uncomfortable we felt. It was not possible to ignore them as if they did not exist, hoping they would tire and turn themselves away. The fact is they do exist. To ignore seemed so effortless, but in fact it took all the energy of an act of violence.

As my Khmer language skills improved I began to feel more confident in the market. When someone asked me for one hundred riel, I was able to talk with them about their lives, not just their situation. They began to teach me many things — which watermelons were more delicious, where I could buy cheap clothes. They would even negotiate a good moto-taxi fare on my behalf.

But more than that, I met people of great courage, who led inspiring lives. Soldiers who had fought for their country, but lost everything including their legs. Women whose husbands had left them when the going got tough, who now cared for the five small children they left behind. Children who had learned early on how to outsmart a foreigner looking for sex. Or farmers who had faced seasons of drought and flood, forcing them to sell their land and in desperation move their family to the pavements of Phnom Penh.

What surprised me was how cheerful these people could be. Quick with a joke and a smile, teasing and playing with each other and their children. To listen and get to know them was to find people full of life, full of courage and, most importantly, full of hope. Not a hope like a birthday wish or a noble dream like world peace. Hope to them means struggle. It is a daily fight for survival. The expectant desire that tomorrow might bring something better. To live without such hope is surely to die. It was the hope that gave strength to the Syrophoenician woman to stand outside the house of a respected religious teacher, shouting and demanding his help. It was her desire to make her daughter well, and her belief that no matter how outcast, she as a human being also deserved the crumbs.

The place where this kind of hope exists is where we find God. Like Jesus, we are often surprised to find God is in the place of the dogs, the outcast, the dregs of our societies. Yet how often we turn God away — from our clean places of worship. How often we try to ignore the vulnerable, humbled, often dirty, scruffy and unconventional God in the market place. How rarely we recognise the crucified Christ in the screams of a desperate woman, a scruffy, mad street tramp or the legless body of a tired and hungry soldier.

And should we embrace such people and walk along a little of their journey, would we not begin to discover hope — the source of our life and the cause for much celebration, laughter and joy?

Emma is an Australian working in Cambodia as a Frontier Intership in Mission intern on the issue of land mines and is currently the moderator of the Youth Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia.

A letter to the Editor

Globalisation and the Social Clause debate

A Response from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions to the ECHOES 12/1997 article "Globalisation and the Social Clause" by Robert Reid.

Dear Editor,

Richard Reid's article on the use of the "Social Clause", which appeared in ECHOES, while interesting, did not give the full picture of the global trade union viewpoint. We would like the opportunity to set the record straight.

We are correctly mentioned in the article as supporting the idea of linking trade and fundamental labour standards, because our 206 affiliates, 75% of which are in developing countries, including Pakistan, Malaysia and Bangladesh as well as Brazil, South Africa and many other countries, believe that this would help trade unions to organise in their countries.

One of the strong arguments for the Social Clause is that it will help poorer countries to achieve a greater balance of power in their dealings with transnational companies. Many TNCs currently move from country to country in search of a compliant, cheap workforce who, because they do not have a union to support and protect them, are easily exploited.

If one looks at the labour standards which the Social Clause includes, it is clear why unions worldwide support it. It includes a set of rules which would force companies and countries to accept the existence of trade unions, and allow them to negotiate with employers whereas, at present, trade union organisers are harassed and even murdered because there are no rules or sanctions to prevent this.

The Social Clause also includes banning universally unacceptable practices such as forced labour (i.e. slavery), child labour and discrimination against women and ethnic minorities. Unions see at first hand what happens when there is no means to control strong employers against weak workers – in some cases workers who are only nine or ten years old.

Another reason why workers worldwide support a social clause is that it is fair – it would be administered by a committee including countries from all regions of the world.

This year, the International Labour Conference, the UN body representing employers, governments and workers, adopted a Declaration of Fundamental Principles at Work. This includes many aspects of the Social Clause, and thus made workers' fundamental rights part of the ground-rules of globalisation. The fight for accepting workers' rights is moving on.

Yours sincerely,
Bill Jordan,
General Secretary

(Editor: see also 'Social Clause as an ideology' by J. John in ECHOES 9/1996)

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES WEBSITE

The WCC website is a site "under construction". That phrase makes web surfers shudder since it usually means that what they're looking for isn't there. Well, the WCC website does exist! Our url: <http://www.wcc-coe.org>. And it contains quite a lot of information, in English, French, German and Spanish, on the:

- Eighth Assembly and 50th Anniversary of the WCC (including an Assembly flyer, update, 50th Anniversary materials, feature service, and information on the Visitors' Programme, the Padare, and press and media services)
- Decade (of Churches in Solidarity with Women) Festival: Visions beyond 1998
- Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC (CUV)
- Resource Sharing Book 1998
- Ecumenical Prayer Calendar 1998
- WCC press releases 1997-98
- WCC publications
- Photo Oikoumene
- Bossey Ecumenical Institute
- Ecumenical Centre and Bossey libraries
- Faith & Order
- Lay Participation towards Inclusive Community
- Programme to Overcome Violence (POV), and the Peace to the City campaign
- Refugee and Migration Service (RMS)
- Action by Churches Together (ACT)
- Member church list
- Employment opportunities

But many big chunks — on the WCC's nature and purpose, functions, organisation, history, and many of its major programmes, as well as links to partner organisations — are still missing.

We're working on it — redesigning and reorganising what is there and supplying what isn't, with the new internal structure of clusters and teams in mind. So watch out for the launch of the new WCC website — "coming soon!".

"The Internet is not, as many people think, about computers. It is about people, communication and information-sharing. It is a way of overcoming physical boundaries, like distance, to allow minds to meet."

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF STREET AND WORKING CHILDREN

A PRACTICAL MANUAL FOR ADVOCATES

by Iain Byrne and the Consortium for Street Children UK, with a foreword by President Nelson Mandela

In spite of the fact that almost all countries have signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children who live and work on the streets or in commercial situations at young ages are subjected to gross injustice and are frequently neglected by national law.

The Human Rights of Street and Working Children is a one-stop guide both for experienced advocates and for non-specialists in the field which explains how to use regional and international treaties and mechanisms for the protection and defence of street and working children when national law fails. The last fifty years has seen the emergence of a range of human rights treaties together with permanent monitoring systems established by the UN. While these are imperfect tools, they can be very useful in supporting national campaigns, and creating pressure for legislative reform or an end to particular violations.

The manual, which presents information in an accessible question-and-answer format, is divided into three sections for ease of reference. The first section defines substantive rights — survival, fair treatment, and empowerment. The second section provides practical guidelines on how to use regional and international human rights systems such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, or the UN Committee on Torture. The third and last section contains a comprehensive list of human rights documents with tables by country detailing the status and the stage in the implementation process of each Convention.

320 pp. October 98. ISBN 1 85339 449 1 - Price: £25.00
Trade orders to: Plymbridge Distributors Ltd, Plymbridge House, Estover Road, Plymouth, Devon, PL6 7PZ, UK.

BIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENTATION IN DEVELOPMENT

edited by Gordon D. Prain and Sam Fujisaka

Much recent "scientific" agricultural research has failed to build upon the valuable experiences and lessons learnt from farmers. *Biological and Cultural Diversity* presents, for the first time, cases of indigenous experimentation as well as the benefits for rural development of new partnerships between farmers and formal research.

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Biological and Cultural Diversity *is published as part of the* ***Intermediate Technology Studies in Indigenous Knowledge and Development*** *series.*
192 pp. August 1998. Paperback. ISBN 1 85339 443 2 - Price: £16.95 / $29.95
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